



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

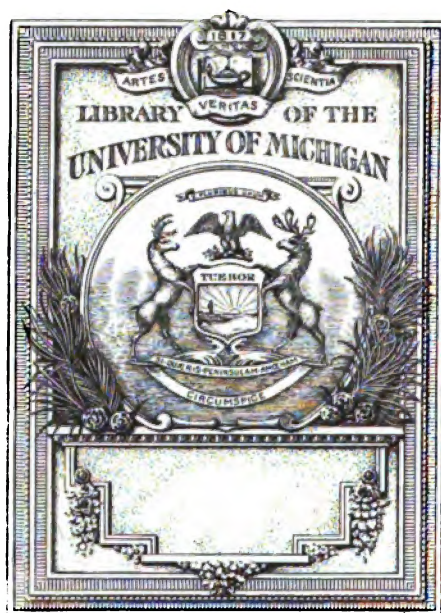
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

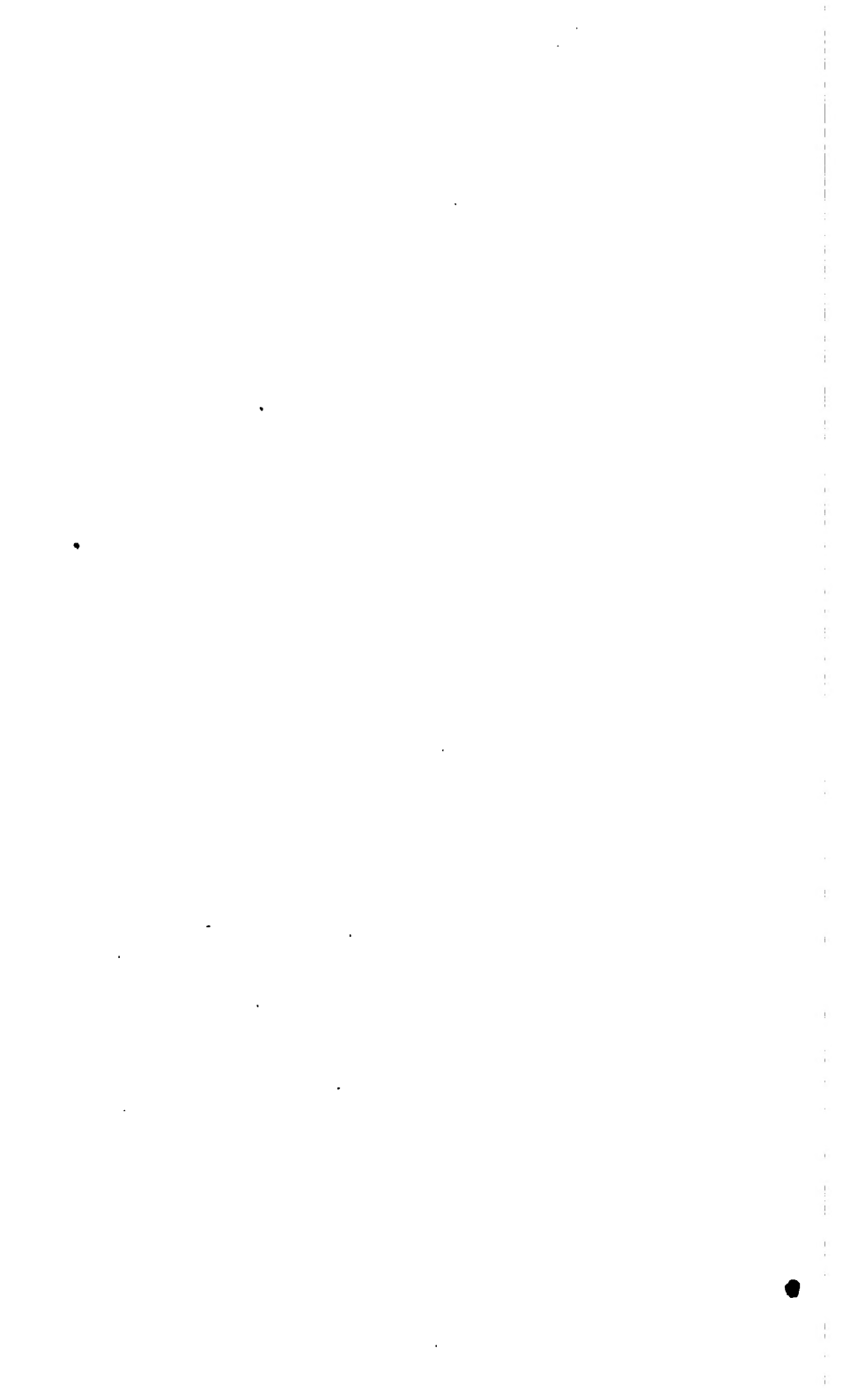
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>











9/15

LONDON SOCIETY.

A Monthly Magazine

OF

LIGHT AND AMUSING LITERATURE

FOR

THE HOURS OF RELAXATION.

VOLUME LVI.

LONDON:

F. V. WHITE & CO.,

31, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1889.

PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO., MIDDLE MILL, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES;
AND GATE STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.

CONTENTS.

Essays, Tales, and Miscellaneous Papers.

	PAGE
Autumn Fishing on the Shannon	426
Béranger	591
Bikanir to Bagdad, From	32
Black Box, The	643
Booked Through	618
Changes of an Hour, The	305
Château in Anjou, From a	481
Curtain Raised, The	267
Dagon's Downfall, Our	406
Dead Leaves in the Park	538
English People Abroad	145
Event of Our Lives, The	419
First Soprano of St. Margaret's, The	289, 390
Golden Sands	63
House of Wittelsbach, The	248, 361
In 1875	534
In One Short Year	185
Ira	498
Josiah Brinkman's Second Marriage	152
Lady Novelist, A	103
London Letters	110, 222, 334, 446, 554, 660
Loriat's Wager	371
NEW OTHELLO, A. By Iza Duffus Hardy. Chapters IV. to XIX.	1, 113, 225, 337, 449, 557

	PAGE
Old House on the Cliff, The	628
Paul Raven's Confession	257
Poisoned Potion, The	193
Provincial Playhouse Forty Years Ago, A	524
Quick Thing, A	54
Quite True	46
"SHEBA." A Study of Girlhood. By "Rita." Chapters XXXVIII. to LI. (Conclusion.)	86, 201, 317, 432, 544
Specimens of Sportsmen	172
Two Paragraphs in the Paris Papers	71
Thirst of the River God, The	603
Wilkie Collins	515
Woman of Thirty-five, The	387

Poetry.

Affinities	288	Long Farewell, A	304
Arab's Adieu, The	386	Love and I	417
By-and-Bye	663	Past and Future	200
Father Damian	497	Star Crown'd the Sweet Night	617
Legend of Lower Brittany, A	541		

LONDON SOCIETY.

JULY, 1889.

A NEW OTHELLO.

A NOVEL.

By IZA DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE, HONOUR AND OBEDY," "NOT EASILY JEALOUS," "ONLY A LOVE STORY,"
"LOVE IN IDLENESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER IV.

DOCTOR FITZALLAN.

"Do we move ourselves? or are we moved by an unseen hand at a game?"

DR. FITZALLAN bowed—a little lower and more formally than the average Englishman generally bows on introduction—and without delay or prefatory remark plunged into serious conversation.

"Are you at all interested in the subject of mesmerism?" he inquired.

"I—I can hardly venture to say I am interested in anything I know so little about," Eileen replied. She was shy, but curious; she coloured a little and looked aside half timidly as she answered, feeling uncomfortably that *she* could not talk to him as cleverer girls could on such topics.

"You have not gone into the subject at all?" he pursued.

"No," she admitted, "I never have—but I—I think I——"

"You *would* soon become interested," he said, finishing her sentence for her. His tone was assured—even authoritative. She felt compelled to look up in his face, shy and timid though she was. When once she had raised her eyes to his, she could not turn them away again. Something in his gaze held hers, fixed and fascinated.

Dr. Fitzallan was a man who seldom smiled—not that his calm and serious composure of expression partook in the least of sadness. There was nothing of melancholy in his look; his unsmiling aspect seemed simply due to the fact that he did not find much in life to provoke smiles. But now the shadow of a smile

flickered under his heavy moustache, and softened the firm, even hard lines of his mouth.

"You are of a susceptible, sensitive temperament," he observed quietly. "Yes, you would be a very good subject."

He turned to the host.

"Mr. Houghton, if this young lady will give me her kind assistance, I think she will prove susceptible to the influence—if there is no objection to my trying the experiment?"

He glanced round, as if anticipating possible prohibition from some anxious parent. Mr. Houghton looked at Mrs. Percival, who, seeing what was going on, hastened forward. The general attention was now fixed on the little group by the hearth.

Eileen, blushing, half flattered, half frightened, cast a timid and appealing glance from Dr. Fitzallan to Mrs. Percival. The latter thought it was time to put in *her* word.

"My little cousin—Miss Dundas—is in my care," she said. "She is not at all strong, and I should really be afraid to sanction any experiments with her if there is the slightest doubt—the least possibility—of there being any injurious consequences——"

Dr. Fitzallan vouchsafed another faint smile as he met her doubtful look with one of self-confident power, a loftily superior air of reassurance.

"They could not be injurious, madam," he said calmly and positively. "I can see Miss Dundas's temperament at a glance. The influence cannot fail to be purely beneficial to her. It is for you to decide, of course," he added deferentially, though with the same tone and attitude of confidence and mastery; "but I can assure you there is not the slightest cause for apprehension of anything but a good effect."

Eileen looked inquiringly at her cousin. She herself really did not know what she wished, and with her natural docility she waited for Mommie's opinion. Mr. and Mrs. Houghton also, standing by deeply interested, looked eagerly at Mrs. Percival. Of course her decision must be conclusive here—but it did seem to them that it would be a pity that any scruple, however natural and conscientious, of hers should deprive them of the opportunity of witnessing some manifestation of Dr. Fitzallan's powers.

Mrs. Percival for her part hesitated. She was interested, curious, anxious to see what he could do. But—to trust Eileen, delicate, nervous Eileen, to this stranger's influence? She wondered what Geoffrey and Ray would say? For the wills and wishes of Messrs. Geoffrey and Ray ruled the Percival household. But the ruling powers were far away and there was no time to deliberate about their probable opinion on the matter. Mrs. Percival was very ignorant of the nature and extent of the magnetic force. She had heard and talked a little, had read less, and seen nothing of its manifestations. As Eileen deferred to her, she ended by appealing to Eileen.

"What do you say, dear?"

That settled the question. Eileen had nothing to say except what Dr. Fitzallan's look, kindly, but compelling, obliged her to say: that she didn't mind—that she was quite willing to do anything they liked. And they—doctor, host, hostess and assembled company—were all anxious, the one to exhibit, the rest to witness, some evidence of Dr. Fitzallan's mesmeric power, and he saw no one present who seemed to him so well calculated to afford an opportunity of such exhibition as Eileen Dundas.

He placed the girl in a chair; the host anxiously requested silence, and the company eagerly gathered round—preserving, however, the respectful distance which the doctor desired.

Most of those present were "outsiders—" ignorant dabblers in the little shallow pools that fringe the sea of knowledge of those forces as yet so imperfectly comprehended by even the wisest of us—a sea whose depths none yet have fathomed. They had just that amount of superficial acquaintance with those subjects which is apt to cause an inclination to boundless belief. This tendency is at the least a step in advance of materialism—the great wave of reaction against which stirs and ruffles the tiny shallow pondlets as well as the ocean deeps.

Regarding magnetism as the key to the mysteries of Nature, they were delighted to witness the operation of a master-hand upon the key, whether they themselves had or had not the slightest power of turning it in the lock; and they watched with eager attention Dr. Fitzallan's proceedings with regard to Eileen Dundas.

"You are not strong?" he said, bending his keen and cold blue eyes not unkindly on her delicate face. "Are you feeling quite well to-night? or are you at all suffering—or in any pain?"

"I have neuralgia all over one side of my head right down to the shoulder," the girl answered; "but it is not very bad. I often have it worse."

"So—so," he said, nodding comprehendingly. "Well, we must see to that."

Some of the company were uttering whispered comments and conjectures upon the to them unfamiliar phenomena of mesmerism. One wondered audibly whether he would make her stare at a silver disc. Another made the cheerful suggestion that people sometimes went into fits!

"Do they?" inquired Mrs. Percival anxiously.

"Certainly, they may," Dr. Fitzallan replied with unruffled calm, "when the operator does not know what he's about. When he knows his business they don't. Now, if you ladies and gentlemen will kindly keep the room quiet for a few minutes, we will see what I can do with Miss Dundas. Look at me," he added to Eileen, laying his hand lightly upon her head.

Some few of the lookers-on were well acquainted with the magnetic sleep-inducing process; but to the majority it was a new

thing to actually witness it, much as they might have heard of it; and they watched Eileen Dundas with eager interest, as under Dr. Fitzallan's compelling gaze and the light touch of his directing hand, she sank quickly into a deep sleep.

The doctor regarded her keenly and critically, then took hold of her hand, and after a minute or two's attentive inspection, raised her arm and passed his fingers down it two or three times. When he let go of the arm it remained uplifted and extended in the air; the girl lay back in her chair motionless as marble, without a tremor in the upraised arm that might have been a statue's.

He took a step backward, his eyes still fixed upon her.

"As I thought," he observed, contemplating his handiwork with a cool satisfied nod. "An excellent subject."

He turned to Mrs. Percival.

"Would you like to speak to your niece, and touch her?" He had mistaken the relationship, and not unnaturally imagined the elder lady to be aunt of the younger.

"Won't it do her harm to be roused?" Mrs. Percival demurred.

"Try to rouse her," he said.

Mrs. Percival tried, spoke to her, touched her, but of course in vain; the girl was fast bound in the magnetic trance.

"Can you move her arm?" he suggested.

Mrs. Percival gently and carefully made the endeavour; she might as well have tried to move an arm of stone.

"Now," said Dr. Fitzallan, addressing the sleeping girl, "how do you feel?"

Eileen answered immediately,

"Quite well."

"Is the neuralgia better?"

"Much better."

He presently stepped aside, partly behind Eileen's chair and quite out of her sight, even had her eyes been open. He fumbled in his pockets, and finally drew out a red morocco card-case. He returned to a position commanding a view of her face, holding out the card-case at arm's length some little distance behind her head, so that it was impossible she could have obtained, under any circumstances, waking or sleeping, a glimpse of it without turning.

"Can you see what I hold in my hand?" he demanded.

"I don't know. I don't think I can."

"Try!" he said authoritatively. "Come; make the attempt. Try to tell me what I hold in my hand!"

The girl did not turn her head nor move an eyelid, but slightly knitted her brows, as if straining her attention.

"It is something small—square," she said slowly.

"What colour?"

"Red—darkish red. Ah, I see! it is a red morocco card-case; it has a gilt monogram on it."

The spectators could not refrain from uttering various notes of

admiration. Exclamations of "Wonderful!" "Remarkable!" "Successful!" "Conclusive!" rippled round the circle.

Dr. Fitzallan tried one or two more such simple and well-known experiments with perfect success; then Mrs. Percival inquired anxiously if Eileen ought to remain so long in the trance.

"It will do her no harm," he replied; "indeed, you will see she will feel all the better. Still, perhaps for a first trial the experiment has lasted long enough; and I think it has been in every way satisfactory."

He cast an interrogative glance round the circle at the last words, and the chorus pronounced it eminently satisfactory, in a variety of terms, but with gratifying unanimity of sentiment.

With a word or two and a few passes of the hands he awakened Eileen, who looked around her with a half-puzzled air, as if just aroused from deep slumber.

"Have I been asleep?" she asked.

"Yes. Have you been dreaming at all?"

"No. I did not know I had been asleep," she said innocently and wonderingly,

"You don't remember any dreams, eh? And the neuralgia—is that any better now?"

"Why, it is quite gone!" she said, putting her hand up to her head.

"I have effected many cures of similar cases. Neuralgic pains are amongst those which are especially amenable to the treatment," he observed.

Mrs. Percival pricked up her ears. What if this new doctor, who had just given them what to her seemed so wonderful an exhibition of his power, should prove able to restore dear little delicate Eily to the rosy health and strength of the rest of the girls?

Dr. Fitzallan was of course the centre of attraction and interest; he was surrounded by a group of inquirers, all eager, one after another, to claim his attention, and, most of them, to put more or less silly questions. Mrs. Percival bided her time, and took an early opportunity of asking their host whether Dr. Fitzallan was settling in London with a view to establishing a practice, whether he was a married man, whether he came with good recommendations, and whether he was now ready to visit and receive patients? Her questions all having been most satisfactorily answered in the affirmative, and being assured that Dr. Fitzallan had had a large practice in America, and was, to the best of Houghton's belief, a perfectly trustworthy adviser in every way, she next availed herself of the first chance of entering into conversation with the doctor aside, and inquiring whether he thought that the magnetic treatment would be really beneficial to Miss Dundas?

"I think it would do her great good," he replied; "it certainly

would do her no harm. I have of course had no opportunity of making anything approaching a thorough diagnosis of Miss Dundas's case. But from what I see, I should say it is a simple one, and most susceptible of our treatment."

"I wonder," said Mrs. Percival, still a little irresolute, "if it would be convenient to you to—to—er—call some day and make a diagnosis"—she was pleased with this word and dwelt upon it with satisfaction—"or, perhaps," she added, with a vague idea that galvanic batteries or electrical machines of some mysterious and possibly not portable kind might be a part of the treatment, "I could bring her to you, if you would prefer that?"

"If you would like, Mrs. Dundas, to place your niece under my medical care for a time, I shall be happy to call and see what I can do for her."

He had mistaken both the name and the relationship, but Mrs. Percival was pursuing her subject with too much interest to stop to correct him.

"Is the treatment a lengthy one? Does it take a long time?" she inquired cautiously, as one who hesitatingly commits a little skiff to unknown seas.

"That depends," he replied in his usual cool way. "But it can be stopped at any hour. If after a time of trial you are not satisfied with the improvement in Miss Dundas's health, it is merely to cease the treatment; there is no harm done by the cessation."

"Well," said Mrs. Percival, suddenly making up her mind and throwing aside all doubt and hesitation, "I shall be very glad, Dr. Fitzallan, if you can do my little cousin any good. And when will it suit you to call? I daresay your time is much occupied; so pray name your own hour and day," she added graciously.

He drew out his pocket-book, consulted it with his accustomed deliberation, and informed her that he could call the next day about four o'clock, if that would be convenient to her.

"Do you hear what we are arranging in your behalf, little woman?" said Mrs. Percival, turning to Eileen. "Dr. Fitzallan is going to try and cure your neuralgia and set up your strength."

"Yes; I hope we shall have Miss Dundas feeling quite a new creature in a little time," he observed, looking kindly at Eileen in answer to her shy appealing smile. There was that soft fawn-like look in her dark eyes which gives so winning a charm to a fair young face.

Mrs. Percival and Eileen reached home before the rest of the family, who lingered late at their dance, and presently all returned radiant and in high spirits. It had been a delightful affair! plenty of men! and a splendid floor! Gertrude had danced every dance, round and square. Rhoda had been fairly beset with partners, and had waltzed four times with such a handsome man, the finest dancer in the room! Kate was smiling and satisfied,

and inclined to dilate on sundry evidences of Dr. Barnabas Grey's devotion, which seemed to have been especially manifested when they had "sat out" a dance in the conservatory.

"Where we have good reason to believe," added Rhoda saucily, "that Barnacles got very sweet!"

But these mild tales of triumph were thrown into the shade by Mrs. Percival's narration of the strange experiences of *her* evening. The tale of course was hers to tell, as Eileen had no consciousness of any of the incidents of her magnetic sleep. It only seemed to her that she had dropped into a doze for a few minutes, and she was amazed to learn that during that slumber she had talked and answered questions.

The girls were one and all much interested. They were as ignorant as babies of the power whose simplest manifestations—as evidenced that night—were to them so strange and startling.

Only Gertrude, the eldest, discreetest and wisest of the quartette, suggested the doubt which had occurred to Mrs. Percival herself, although she had not put it into words—what would Geoffrey think of this new treatment as applied to Eileen? and how would Ray regard it?

Mrs. Percival's reply—to her own doubts as well as to Gertrude's—was the relation of some of the tales of wondrous cures which she had heard that night, and especial dwelling on the fact that the neuralgia which had racked Eileen's head with pain had been completely conjured away.

Eileen herself was divided between a sense of shy pleasure and innocent excitement at having been, albeit so unconsciously, the heroine of the evening, and an uneasy wonder whether Geoff and Ray would laugh at all this? Geoffrey's incredulity would carry with it Eileen's disbelief. If he said it was so, or it was not so, his word would go far to convince Eileen against the evidence of her own senses.

The next day, about the appointed hour, Dr. Fitzallan kept his engagement. He found all the family assembled in the drawing-room; for the girls, true daughters of Eve, had unanimously given up the visits they had intended to pay that afternoon, and remained at home to see him.

Mrs. Percival came forward to meet him with the double cordiality of her habitual warm-hearted good-nature and her lately aroused interest. The Houghtons were certainly the first discoverers of this new centre of attraction; but she was at least second in the field.

"I am a little behind my time, I fear," he said.

"Not at all; I assure you you are very punctual."

"And how is Miss Dundas to-day?" he asked as Eileen, following her cousin, came forward to greet him. "Any recurrence of the neuralgia?"

"A little," she replied; "but not so bad as I often have it."

Kitty, who was nearer the door than Gertrude or Rhoda, was taking mental notes of the new doctor's appearance with unconcealed curiosity. Catching her glance, Mrs. Percival introduced Eileen's sister, "Miss Kate Dundas," and, turning to the others, added the brief introduction:

"My sister, Miss Carresford, and my daughter."

Dr. Fitzallan glanced up quickly, with almost a startled look. He bowed with that deep and deferential courtesy and seriousness which imparted a certain old-world foreign air to his salutation. His glance passed lightly over pretty Kate, and fixed instantly with interest on Gertrude.

"Do you see any of the qualities in the rest of my little flock which you saw last night in Eileen, which made you think directly that she would be a good subject for the—the mesmeric treatment?" Mrs. Percival inquired, observing a certain intentness in the regard he bent on Gertrude.

His eyes turned slowly from one to another of the "little flock."

"No," he replied. "As far as one can judge at a first glance, I should say that Miss Eileen Dundas is the only 'sensitive' of your family. Of course there are many various grades and degrees of sensitiveness. I should imagine, for instance, that Miss Carresford was more susceptible to such influences than this young lady, Miss——." He paused interrogatively as he looked at Rhoda.

"Percival—Rhoda Percival," her mother answered, smiling, "my only daughter."

"Miss Percival," he repeated slowly. "Excuse my mistaking the names. I had not the pleasure of seeing your card, and only caught your name imperfectly."

The interest with which he had looked at Gertrude was now transferred to the gaze he fixed on Mrs. Percival's face—a keen look of observant inspection, so free and fearless it had a touch of daring, one might almost say, of defiance.

A bold and straightforward look has almost always a certain charm for women. The general impression which Dr. Fitzallan produced at first acquaintance on all the family was not an unpleasant one.

"I don't think I should be in the smallest degree susceptible," observed Gertrude.

"And I'm sure I shouldn't," protested Rhoda.

"Probably not," Dr. Fitzallan admitted, glancing at the latter's blooming face; "but it is impossible to be quite sure."

And something in that piercing glance made Rhoda feel a secret wavering of doubt whether after all she *was* so very sure that it was possible to be absolutely certain of impenetrability in regard to a mysterious and uncomprehended influence. The girls all agreed, when they compared notes, that there certainly was an atmosphere of powerful and indomitable will about this

Dr. Fitzallan, which made it easy to understand his possessing such an influence as that he claimed to exercise.

Presently, in obedience to a suggestion of Mrs. Percival's, doctor and patient were left alone with her. She took up a piece of fancy work, and settled herself in her armchair with an air of wishing to be regarded as a piece of the furniture of the room, but a deeply-interested and curious piece of furniture, as her expressive face betrayed.

Dr. Fitzallan asked Eileen a few simple questions about her health, and then proceeded to put her to sleep as before, only this time he practised no experiments, and confined himself to magnetizing the side of her head and neck which were chiefly affected by the neuralgia. On awaking, as on the previous occasion, she was quite freed from pain, and said she felt altogether better and stronger.

"Well, dear," suggested Mrs. Percival presently, "suppose you go and tell Kitty how well you are getting on, while I have a little chat with the doctor? Now, Dr. Fitzallan," she added, as the door closed behind Eileen, "please tell me just what your opinion is about my dear girl."

"Miss Dundas is in a very nervous and delicate state of health," he replied; "but you have no ground for uneasiness. There is nothing radically or organically wrong with her. As she grows stronger these neuralgic pains and the attacks of faintness she describes will cease."

"Tonics don't seem to do her any good," observed Mrs. Percival; "quinine and iron don't give her strength. We have tried everything."

"And unsuccessfully," he rejoined. "Hers is not a case for drugs; but under the magnetic treatment I think you will find her health improve very rapidly; and, as you can see for yourself, it is a perfectly simple and innocuous method. You have felt, I see, some little qualms of doubt as to entrusting the young lady to a curative process which I perceive is quite new to you; but those doubts will soon be, if they are not already, removed. Three or four of these magnetic sleeps in a week and you will soon see strength and health restored to your niece—cousin——"

"Yes, she is my cousin; but really these two young cousins of mine, brought up with my own children, are almost like daughters to me."

"They are very fortunate in having such a relative to care for them. You have other children, Mrs. Percival?"

"One other—my eldest—my son," she answered, with the involuntary accent of proud affection with which she always spoke of Ray. "He is now travelling with my brother. Our family relations are curiously mixed, the two generations hopelessly tangled together," she added, smiling. "My brother and my boy are more like two brothers than uncle and nephew."

"Yes?" he said in polite interrogation. "You must have married very young, of course?"

"Out of the schoolroom," she answered, truly enough; "so my brother was a little fellow in knickerbockers when my boy was born."

"A delightful relationship," he observed. "And they are now on their travels together?"

"Yes, homeward bound, I am glad to say," replied Mrs. Percival, who did not belong to the reserved class, and was quite ready to take a stranger into her confidence if the stranger appeared sympathetic. "We expect them back next week; they are coming from New York; sailed yesterday on the 'City of Naples.'"

"On the 'City of Naples'?" he repeated, his expression of courteous interest wakening up to an almost startled look of livelier curiosity. "Why, my wife is coming over on board that vessel!"

"Indeed?" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, also with lively interest. "What a coincidence! Very likely," she added, giving rein to her imagination, "they have already met and made acquaintance, little thinking that *we* have had the pleasure of making *your* acquaintance here at home. And I am sure it is very fortunate for dear Eileen that *we* have met you. Ray and Geoffrey will be glad to find her so much better."

"Those are your travellers—your brother and son?"

"Yes, Geoffrey is my brother—Geoffrey Carresford," said Mrs. Percival, who was a most satisfactory person to get information out of. Dr. Fitzallan did not appear to her at all unusually or singularly interested in the branches of her family tree. She was ready and willing to talk of her dear ones, and regarded it as only natural that he should be equally ready to listen. When she asked him to fix the next appointment, and kindly left it to him to name his own time, she had no idea that in his secret heart he was vexedly and seriously deliberating with himself whether or not he should consent to continue his attendance on Eileen Dundas, in the new light of the discovery of her family relations. His hesitation ended, however, in defiance of the suggestions of prudence, in the decision that he was already too much interested professionally in the treatment of so promising a subject to give up the case—even though the girl did belong by the ties of birth and blood, as well as of daily home-life, to the Carresfords.

So while the great steamer ploughed her steady and majestic way over the long slow swell of the Atlantic waves, bearing Geoffrey and Ray homeward to the bosom of their family, eagerly and fondly waiting to welcome the dear wanderers back—bearing Mrs. Fitzallan also to the husband who, of course, was equally eagerly and affectionately awaiting her—this husband was putting Eileen Dundas through the course of magnetic treatment most success-

fully, and her sister and cousins were rejoicing in her improvement. The acquaintance rapidly developed into a superficial intimacy—a shallow but agreeable social intercourse. Mrs. Percival and the girls talked a great deal of Geoffrey and Ray, and Dr. Fitzallan now and then talked a little, but a very little, of his wife. And day by day Eileen's soft dark eyes grew brighter, and a little fitful colour came slowly back to her cheeks and lips as the great "City of Naples" drew nearer and nearer to the land; and not one of all that radiant and happy little circle dreamt how

"More than one and more than two
The sorrow of this should see."

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE SPELL.

"The wine is bright at the goblet's brim,
Though the poison lurk beneath."

THE Percivals lived in one of those favoured localities which combine the advantages of London and the country, at the small cost of being called suburban by Hyde Park and Belgravia. They were within easy reach of the great central thoroughfares, and were no impracticable nor uncomfortable distance from the theatres, galleries, and other chief objects of interest. All the social and other benefits of London life were theirs; while yet in the garden which lay concealed by high walls and higher trees behind their house, all the charms, the peace and seclusion of the country were to be found.

The house stood on a slight eminence; in front was a narrow slip of flower-garden, and behind it the ground, which declined in a rapid slope, had been laid out in three terraces. The uppermost one was a fine smooth lawn, like a stretch of soft green velvet, edged by flower-beds; from this two shallow flights of steps at either end led down to a shrubbery flanked by rich ferneries and rock-work; and thence was another steep descent, by winding path and step, to what the girls had dubbed the "Lower Depths," which might have been a piece of pure wild woodland, so luxuriant was the leafage there—bushes, trees, ferns and flowers all growing in their natural freedom and untrained abundance. Nothing was allowed to be done in the way of cultivation in the "Lower Depths," save keeping the paths clear of growth, and the removal of unsightly weeds or unsafe branches; thus the picturesque wilderness of these green shades might have been twenty miles from town, while the whole garden was shut in by fine forest trees, so tall and luxuriant that only here and there could the chimney-pots of the adjacent houses be seen.

On one of the fairest days of ripening spring, when the air is balmy and golden with a forecast of summer, a pleasant party were gathered on the upper lawn. Mrs. Percival was enthroned in the most comfortable chair, with Dr. Fitzallan in close attendance. A shawl was spread on the grass at her feet, on which Eileen, who had a kitten-like aptitude for curling herself up on the ground, was half reclining, leaning against Momie's knee and playing with Ray's dog—a large brown pointer, with a coat like satin, and mild eyes full of love and intelligence. Gertrude and Rhoda were lounging on a garden-seat—Gertrude, sedately occupied with some fancy work; Rhoda, happy and idle. The group was completed by Kitty, who had gradually drifted to its outermost edge—Kitty, blooming and lovely in a fresh white dress and pink ribbons, her sweetest smiles dimpling about her mouth, and beamingly content. Her sweetness was not being wasted, for Dr. Barnabas Grey, irreverently known amongst the girls as “Barnacles,” was by her side.

Dr. Grey was certainly no match for fair Kitty in looks; he was rather stout, just below middle height, with plain and sallow features, short-sighted eyes and spectacles, and a chronic line like a frown on his brow, which was, however, an expression rather of intentness than ill-temper. But plain though he was, he had a sweet smile, a big, intellectual forehead, and a thoroughly good and trustworthy aspect—and Kate certainly liked him at present better than any of her other admirers. Absorbed as he was in Kate Dundas, he had yet a little attention and interest to spare for Dr. Fitzallan. Of course he had heard all about the new mesmeric practitioner, and his cure of Eileen; he was not sceptical, for he had himself seen something of magnetism; but while he was not in the least inclined to sneer at the cure, he had not been enthusiastic in his expressions of congratulation. The girls were not at all surprised at this, first, because “Barnacles” was set down in their mental tablets as a quiet, dry, unenthusiastic person; secondly, because they thought it quite natural that he should not feel unmixed delight that a stranger from abroad should step in and succeed where his own brethren had failed—his brethren, not he, for Dr. Grey had no personal interest in the case; he had never been called in professionally to attend the family.

Dr. Fitzallan and Mrs. Percival had been talking of one thing and another, and some chance turn in the conversation took it back to the beginning of their acquaintance, and to Eileen and the improvement of her health.

“She is quite a different girl already,” said Mrs. Percival; “I am sure we ought to be—and we all *are*—very grateful to you, Dr. Fitzallan.”

“The gratitude ought to be on my side, Mrs. Percival; for the advantage is really chiefly mine. It is a pleasure and a privilege to find a subject so gifted as Miss Eileen. She is developing remarkable powers of clairvoyance in its simplest form. It is true

that I have not yet seen any signs of promise of the higher lucidity in her."

"No?" said Mrs. Percival doubtfully and inquiringly. "You mean——?"

"That she has no power of seeing anything more than I *will* her to see; she can tell nothing that I do not know. It is not clairvoyance of the first order. Of course it is possible she may develop it yet, although I can perceive no signs of it."

Eileen was looking up with much interest. "Is it not curious," she asked, "that I don't know anything at all about it? I mean, I don't *remember* anything. When I wake up, it is only as if I had just dropped into a sleep for a few minutes."

"Yes," he said with one of his rare kind smiles, "all that has transpired during your sleep is like one of those dreams which are forgotten on waking. But you may remember what has happened from one dream to another."

"Most curious!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival. "Of course, Dr. Fitzallan, you naturally find the deepest interest of your life in these investigations?"

"Yes," he assented. "I have devoted many years of my life to their study. You see they are important, inestimable, with regard to the advancement of science—that is, of humanity! The true aim of all science is to benefit humanity; to assist in its slow, but sure progress—onwards and upwards. And in this force, of which we only now stand on the threshold of comprehension, there are enfolded incalculable possibilities of good."

"And of evil too," suggested Dr. Barnabas Grey, who had been lately lending an attentive ear to the conversation, and now put in his word for the first time.

"Yes, if the power should be degraded or profaned by falling into evil hands," Dr. Fitzallan admitted. He spoke with his usual strong composure, tempered by a touch of sadness, yet with a certain lofty and exalted confidence that seldom indeed could such a disaster befall. "But the same may be said of many—nay, of all the acknowledged factors in civilization—of steel, fire, steam, electricity. The agent powerful for good is powerful for evil too. Creation and destruction are only different expressions of the same force. Even the very drug that is medicine in a drachm is poison in a draught. The small dose cures, the larger kills. The fruit of death and the fruit of life grow on the same branch."

"And sometimes one may make a mistake in the gathering," observed Dr. Grey.

"True, but even such mistakes are a part of the great law."

"The law of unending conflict and eternal warfare—the forces of good and evil swaying level in everlasting balance—all life preying on life, all existence a struggle without end, without victor and without vanquished."

"Not without end," said Dr. Fitzallan. "The law of life is no purposeless struggle, that stands still and leaves off where it began—no battle for the mere breath of to-day. Evolution is the law of the universe; all life is progress. The forces of light and darkness, Ormuzd and Ahriman, have been in conflict since the world began; but the stars in their courses fight against Ahriman, and the final triumph of Ormuzd is assured."

"You are very fortunate to be so sure of it," observed Dr. Grey.

"How true, and how beautiful to think!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival.

"Yes," Dr. Fitzallan continued, warming to his subject. "Perfect light, perfect truth, perfect good—there is the ultimate goal towards which we all are progressing. There is no real retrogression; the reaction that is apparently a backward movement is only the spring of recoil. The higher emotions develop and grow out of the lower ones. As soul develops from body, so animal progresses to man, man to spirit, spirit to God. Day and night succeed each other, but the brightness of noonday is without a shadow, and in the darkest hour of night the stars and moon break out from behind the clouds. So light conquers darkness; and so we can see typified in every cloudless noon, and every moonlit night, the triumph of Ormuzd over Ahriman!"

Dr. Fitzallan had just arrived at this satisfactory conclusion, carrying his audience—at least the feminine majority of his audience—with him, when the neat-handed maiden, whose name was not Phyllis, but Mary Anne, came across the lawn bearing one of those orange-yellow envelopes which startle nervous people—on catching sight of which the women immediately lost all interest in optimistic philosophy and forgot the abstract in the concrete. Mrs. Percival tore the envelope open eagerly.

"Ah, from Queenstown!" she exclaimed gladly. "They have arrived all right. Due at Liverpool to-morrow morning!" Her joyful exclamation was echoed by the four girls who clustered round her in delighted interest.

Mrs. Percival was the first to remember that Dr. Fitzallan had his part of interest in the arrival of the "City of Naples."

"And Mrs. Fitzallan is on that steamer? Then the news is good news for you too, doctor. I dare say there is a telegram waiting for you at home," she said smilingly.

"Shall you go down to Liverpool to meet her?"

"That will depend on her telegram. I think in all probability I shall go and meet her at Euston Station."

"Oh, Momie!" cried Rhoda, catching at the idea, "couldn't we all go and meet Geoff and Ray?"

"Well, I think, dear, we should be rather overpowering. You know you would none of you stay behind, and I'm afraid we should be rather like the whole of the 'Pinafore' chorus let loose on the platform."

"And so we should be," cried Rhoda, bursting into the chorus. "For we are their sisters and their cousins and their *aunts*!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Percival, "and I think their sisters and cousins and aunts——"

"And *mothers*!" put in Eileen playfully and caressingly, rubbing her cheek against Momie's knee, like an affectionate kitten.

"Had better stay and embrace them at home," Mrs. Percival continued.

"Well, Dr. Fitzallan, I wish we were *you*," exclaimed Rhoda with a playful pout. "*You* can go and meet your own wife."

"Yes, I certainly have that privilege," he acknowledged; "and I may be graciously permitted to look after the baggage, and hurry up the porters, and attend to all the business."

"You know there couldn't be a happier or pleasanter business," said Mrs. Percival with her sweet sympathetic smile. Momie had not much intellect, but she had a heart of gold; her nature was so "full of the milk of human kindness" that it overflowed even beyond her own family to all her friends and acquaintances.

"Now I suppose you are dying to rush home and get your telegram," exclaimed Kate.

"Dying? Well, I trust I shall not die till I have got it." He smiled one of his slightest, coolest smiles. It occurred to Dr. Grey—a calm and critical looker-on—that the insistence of the family on posing him as a devoted and impatient husband aroused in him a sort of reactionary air of superiority to the mere human emotionalism of domestic affections.

Whether it was that he felt the anxiety they all expected him to feel concerning the telegram which they took it for granted was awaiting him, or whether he fancied himself *de trop* in the happy family discourse, which followed the arrival of the glad tidings, Dr. Fitzallan soon took his leave.

"I think if I had a husband," observed Kitty, "I should like him to manifest a little more delight at the prospect of seeing me after a long separation."

"Perhaps it has not been such a long one," suggested Gertrude.

"Well, it ought to *seem* long to him, anyhow," said Rhoda.

"I suppose they have left their honeymoon a good way behind. Dr. Fitzallan is no longer a young man," remarked Mrs. Percival.

"And not a man to wear his heart upon his sleeve at any age, I should fancy," added Gertrude.

"I should think he was a very reserved man," said Eileen, softly putting in her gentle word. "There is a sort of silent power about him; it's not what he *says*, but one *feels* it."

"Yes," Dr. Grey agreed, "there is something cool and strong and confident, yet reticent in the extreme, in his manner. I fancy he very seldom lets the daws get a chance of pecking at *his* heart."

"He never has any small talk ready," said Mrs. Percival. "He is one of the men who have no small change, but plenty of gold in

their pockets. And he has such true and beautiful ideas. I do like to see that firm and hopeful faith in goodness—in everything turning out for the best.”

“Yes, there is a great charm in optimism,” Dr. Grey agreed. Then presently he followed Dr. Fitzallan’s example and took his departure. Kitty strolled with him along the path towards the gate.

“It always seems to me somehow as if Dr. Fitzallan ought to have been a clergyman,” she observed.

“A natural idea enough, as he seems given to preaching,” Dr. Barnabas Grey rejoined drily. “That sort of high-flown talk often goes soaring up like a balloon without a car—it takes nothing with it, and goes nowhere in particular.”

“Careers vaguely about the empyrean,” laughed Kate. “I think that is where Dr. Fitzallan exercises *his* hobby-horse, up above the clouds. I suppose I’m not clever enough to follow him.”

“Thank Heaven!” ejaculated Dr. Grey. “You are much better walking steadily here with your feet on the solid earth. Don’t let him be mesmerizing *you*, Miss Kate.”

“*Me*? He couldn’t if he tried. And if he were to try it on any other of us, the next one would be Gertrude. He says *she’s* the only one, after Eileen, who shows any signs of possible sensitiveness to the influence. But, if he did mesmerize *me*——” She paused, with a faint deepening of the colour on her cheek.

“Well, *if*?” said Dr. Barnabas.

Kate looked down a little coyly and demurely as she added:

“Why should you wish him not to?”

“It is not a power that I should like to see exercised by any man over—over——” it was his turn to pause and hesitate—“any woman I—I was—interested in.”

“And are you not interested in my sister Eileen?” she rejoined reproachfully.

“Yes. As your sister,” he said. “But I confess I have some doubts as to the discretion of allowing *her*—and I should be more than sorry to see *you*—placed under the influence of this stranger about whom no one seems to know anything. Where did he study, and get his diploma?”

“How *should* I know?” replied Kate. “I don’t know if he’s got one at all. In America, I suppose,” she added; “he talks of having ‘studied’ there; and I believe he had a large practice there. How suspicious you are about the poor man! I dare say he’s a very good doctor. We all like him well enough. Mommie thinks there never was such a man; and he certainly is doing Eileen a great deal of good, there’s no doubt of that.”

“Well, that is something satisfactory,” he replied. “All the same, I am glad *you* don’t require to be done any good to.”

“So am I. There’s never anything the matter with *me*! There is nothing whatever to recommend me as a patient.”

"No; that is not a light in which I should have thought of either regarding or recommending you to my brethren," he observed smiling.

They had reached the gate by this time.

"Well, good-bye," said Kate gaily. "Next time you come you'll see my cousins, King Geoffrey and Prince Ray, and you'll find us all in assorted attitudes of adoration."

* * * * *

The midday train from Liverpool is rushing at express speed, with thundering rhythm and smooth and steady swing, on its way to London, bearing a goodly number of the passengers who have landed that morning from the "City of Naples."

Amongst these are the Rockleigh party and their friends, in luxurious possession of one of those saloon carriages which are attached to the London express for the accommodation of ease-loving travellers. Lord Rockleigh and General Peyton are deep in a political discussion, which is peaceful and pleasant because they are both of one mind. Lady Rockleigh and the Hon. Algernon Vesey, each with a newspaper in hand, are exchanging notes about the news as they dip into the columns. Lady May Rivers has also a newspaper in her lap and Geoffrey Carresford has two or three; but although they, like the rest, have been debarred for nine days from the luxury of their daily paper, they neither of them seem disposed to make the most of the regained privilege now that it is theirs again. Their newspapers lie neglected; their heads are inclined towards each other; they are indulging in reminiscences of the recent voyage and prospective plans for the remainder of the season. Mrs. Fitzallan, who has been honoured by an invitation to join the distinguished party on their journey up, and Ray Percival are thus left to entertain each other; *he* asks nothing better; and *she* is as placidly and passively willing to talk to him as to any one else—if anything, rather more willing, perhaps, as nine days of constant association from morning to night cannot fail to develope a comfortable "at-home" feeling of familiarity; and in the course of the daily intercourse of the voyage, Mrs. Fitzallan has become pleasantly accustomed to take Ray Percival's unremitting care for her as a matter of course.

The travelling party are all in lively mood. The ordeals of the voyage and the Custom House are safely over; they are all—except Mrs. Fitzallan—in their native land; and however small the smouldering spark of patriotism may be nowadays, yet in some form or another, in greater or less degree, the love of country still burns in every English breast; and there are few things that fan it into a more genial glow than a return to our native island after an absence in far-off lands. So every one is in good spirits.

As to Geoffrey Carresford, *he* has looked from the moment that he strode through the crowd along the wharf at Liverpool, as

if he ought to be saying, "My foot is on my native heath, and my name is McGregor!" His good humour is increased by the circumstance that during the trials and troubles of the landing it fell to his lot to take care of Lady May. All that day she has looked up to him with the most bewitching air of reliance and dependence, morally clinging to him through the tribulations of the Custom House; leaning on his arm with that half timid, half trustful smile, which is so sweetly flattering to mankind, as he piloted her through the crowd, and on entering the saloon carriage motioning him to a place beside her by a slight and to all but him imperceptible glance and gesture, which charmingly implied confidence and mutual sympathy. So Geoffrey is in a gay and happy mood:

"His bosom's lord sits lightly on its throne!

his sometimes cold and stolid blue eyes are bright with heart's sunshine as they meet the Lady May's.

Ray Percival also is ready to talk and laugh; but his high spirits spring really more from a sense of curiously mixed excitement than from pure joy. He is very fond of his family, and glad to be home again; but his pleasure is dashed by the reflection that in his case home, sweet home, means probable parting from his new friend—possibly losing sight of her entirely. In the great world of London it is so easy to drift apart when the desire to keep in sight is only on one side. Mrs. Fitzallan has shown no sign of regarding their travelling acquaintance—intimate though it has naturally been, as such acquaintances always are—in the light of anything like a lasting friendship. He feels that when once this brief little journey is over, she may slip out of his sight—out of his reach.

So much depends on the manner of man her unknown husband may prove to be. Ray has already made up his mind to cultivate his acquaintance if possible; but he knows too well that it may not be possible or practicable. There may simply be a brief meeting in a crowd at the railway station; the husband may take his wife away to his own world—away from the circle of her new acquaintances—away from all the associations of the voyage—out of their sight and their ken for good and all! Ray has ascertained Mrs. Fitzallan's plans and prospects as far as she knows them herself—but this is not very far, very little indeed beyond the day. She is uncertain herself whether their headquarters will be in London or on the Continent—uncertain where they will settle at all just yet.

This uncertainty does not seem to affect Mrs. Fitzallan's serenity in the least. It does affect Ray Percival's; he knows very well that it is, or should be, a matter of no interest to him; he knows he ought not to care; and the consciousness that he *does* care ruffles him. He would like to have her settled in London,

getting intimately acquainted with his mother and sister. Vague visions—vague, but attractive and tantalizing—flit before his mind's eye, of Mrs. Fitzallan as a friend of the family—dropping in to afternoon tea—dining—driving with them—a favourite of his mother's—chatting in sisterly confidence with the girls. This is what he would like—this acquaintance cemented into a steady family friendship. He wants his own people to know her—to know her as *he* knows her—so beautiful, so good, so pure, so true! Desdemona read Othello's visage in his mind; Ray reads Mrs. Fitzallan's mind in her visage. He is sure that it can be none but a beautiful nature that looks out of those clear eyes—that nothing but purity and truth can dwell in a form so fair!

Although they are drawing minute by minute now so near to her husband—that husband seems still to Ray a kind of myth. Mrs. Fitzallan is not the type of woman who seems incomplete without her husband. Nay, to Ray the absent Fitzallan appears in the light of a quite unnecessary and superfluous appendage. If Mrs. Fitzallan is excited by the near prospect of reunion, she shows no sign of it, except that the faintest touch of rose-bloom warms her pale cheek.

"Are you very happy?" Ray ventures to ask her, in a slightly lowered voice. "You have a colour—I never saw you with a colour before."

"Do you suspect I have been celebrating the occasion by a little artificial aid to beauty?" she rejoins laughingly, and the colour proves its genuineness by deepening just a shade.

"No, and I am sure it wasn't needed," he replies.

"Perhaps it is that your climate agrees with me," she observes lightly. "I may blossom like a rose when I've been here a little while."

"I hope you will," he says. "I do hope you'll like England. Dr. Fitzallan will find you looking well, I think—he will be satisfied that we hand you over to him in good condition."

She vouchsafes one of her calm distant smiles, a smile bright and cold as moonlight.

"You have been very kind, and taken very good care of me," she replies with cool and easy gentleness.

"I—I should be awfully sorry if I thought we were going to lose sight of you altogether, Mrs. Fitzallan," he says with a boyish hesitation, his own colour rising. "Shan't we—mayn't we—have the pleasure of seeing you sometimes?"

"I really do not know what my husband's plans may be, or how long we may stay in London," is her answer; and Ray feels himself mildly but effectually held at a distance.

Now the green fields give place to brick walls; the bright blue of the sky pales into that faint, dull, lurid haze which in certain states of the atmosphere broods over the whole of our great city. They are running through the suburbs of London, and the pleasant

bustle of collecting baggage begins. The train enters Euston Station, and as it glides in at slackened speed Mrs. Fitzallan looks out of the window, seeking with an unusual eagerness in her eyes among the scattered crowd along the platform. Ray, watching her, sees her smile and wave her hand; and quickly following her glance, he perceives a grey-bearded man in a light coat, with a soft felt hat slouched over his grey hair, raising his hand in answering signal. Is *that* her husband? thinks Ray disapprovingly; why, he might be her father! Dr. Fitzallan approaches the edge of the platform and walks along by the window as the train slows. His steel-bright eyes fix on his wife's face with a calm smile of welcome; he quietly takes her hand as it rests on the sill; all his spoken greeting consists of that universal and general remark of mankind of the Saxon race on meeting, "Here you are!"

The train comes to a standstill. Dr. Fitzallan, stepping forward to the door, stands by and watches with cool attention as the travellers alight—first the Rockleighs; then Geoffrey hands out Lady May; then comes Ray Percival, who turns assiduously to offer a helping hand to Mrs. Fitzallan, but her husband is before him. Dr. Fitzallan receives his wife as she steps on to the platform, and kisses her in a matter-of-course way, with an easy inquiry as to whether she is "all right?" Then he glances round at the group of her fellow-passengers as she turns to bid them good-bye, and acknowledge, in a few words of thanks, their kindness to her during the voyage. Dr. Fitzallan is pleasantly impressed by the names he catches in the course of these brief parting salutations.

Lord Rockleigh, Lady Rockleigh, Lady May!

Then Mrs. Fitzallan turns to Mr. Carresford and Mr. Percival; and her husband's eyes fix keenly on these two as they stand side by side—fine specimens both of English manhood in early prime. He looks at Geoffrey, with his stalwart Saxon physique, his expression of almost indolent good-humour and impassive strength—at Ray, with his brighter, quicker glance, and general air as of higher spirit and warmer blood.

Ray, meeting his glance, acknowledges it by a slight gesture of salutation, and observes to Mrs. Fitzallan—

"Your husband—Dr. Fitzallan?"

"Yes," she smiles, and hastily goes through the form of presenting her husband to Mr. Carresford and Mr. Percival.

Geoffrey acknowledges the introduction by a formal bow—Ray, bent on furthering the acquaintance, with much more *empressé* cordiality. It is Ray who seizes on such slight opportunity of conversation as the occasion affords; but it is Geoffrey on whom Dr. Fitzallan's piercing gaze is fixed; it dwells on his features as if seeking to trace some likeness, some reminiscence, while Geoffrey's cool glance passes over the doctor's face with absolute indifference. Lady May and home divide his thoughts between them; he has none to spare for Mrs. Fitzallan's husband—does not in the least

care indeed whether she has a husband or not! There is little room for making acquaintance in the hurry and bustle of a railway station meeting. The party, grouped together for a few brief minutes, speedily break up and scatter in search of cabs, porters, luggage. The Rockleighs' carriage is waiting. Hasty good-byes are the order of the hour.

"Come, Asenath!" says Dr. Fitzallan, cutting short his wife's farewells to her late fellow travellers. Ray Percival turns an attentive ear. So that is her Christian name! He has been wondering what it was. He has never before happened to come across that Puritan name, not uncommon in New England; and there seems to him a sort of cool sedate sweetness and character about it that suits her well. As the cab that bears him and Geoffrey homeward jolts and rattles through the streets, he is repeating it to himself, and it sounds the sweeter for the repetition.

"Asenath—her name is Asenath!"

CHAPTER VI.

"HOME, SWEET HOME."

"After years of life together,
After fair and stormy weather."

THE welcome that awaited Geoffrey and Ray at the latter's home could not have been warmer if they had been restored from the dangers of a campaign, or escaped from accidents by flood and field. The very cabman smiled in sympathy—having pocketed a very satisfactory fare—as he landed a portmanteau in the hall and glanced at the group of bright, flushed and smiling faces surrounding the returned travellers. Sisters or sweethearts, they were a set of good-looking girls—and how happy they all seemed! and the mother too! One touch of nature makes even those natural enemies, the fare and the cabman, akin.

Now the first excitement of meeting was over, the welcomed wanderers were in the drawing-room, surrounded by their adoring womenkind, and graciously allowing themselves to be made much of and set up on pedestals for domestic worship!

The family likeness between them all came out noticeably when they were thus gathered together.

Geoffrey Carresford and his two sisters resembled each other strongly; they were all fair and comely, and both in feature and figure moulded on full and generous lines; but Gertrude had more of her brother's *sangfroid* of expression than Mary Percival, who was the most animated, as well as the most delicate-featured, of the three. Even the two Dundas girls, with their more Celtic type and dark hair and eyes, had now and then a look that showed they too were of the Carresford blood. The strongest likeness of

all was perhaps that which existed between Ray and his mother. They had the same finely-cut, sensitive lips, the same line of profile, though softer in hers, the same expression, the look of warm and emotional natures, with whom every hour of life was thoroughly *lived*. No vegetation in existence for these two; no sipping at the surface of the cup! They would "drink life to the lees," drain the draught of joy as well as that of pain. Ray was nearly a head taller than his mother; he had his father's height, and she was very proud to look up at her tall handsome son. He took his colouring from his father too, the fair complexion and brown eyes, the slight tawny moustache and darker brown hair, enriched by a distinct touch of auburn. From his father, too, he inherited the half haughty way of drawing back his head, the broad forehead, and level brows which had a trick of lowering when anything did not please him, thus bringing a somewhat stern and even sullen look over the fair frank face.

"Well, now, how are you all?" exclaimed Geoffrey, pulling himself up and stretching his long limbs, as he stood in the central position upon the hearth and looked beamingly round on his family circle.

"*You're* all right, mater, I see—you look jolly!" said Ray, filially bestowing his first attention on his mother, whilst his dog Ponto, allowed in the drawing-room as a favour on this joyful occasion, fawned upon his master, mumbled his hand and wreathed himself into the shape of a letter "S" with delight.

"And how's Eileen?" inquired Geoffrey, turning to his little pale cousin, whose thin cheek was much pinker than usual. "Why, Eily, I heard you were ill! You look as fresh as a rose!"

The girl's lips parted in a soft happy smile. Joy had indeed brought a transient bloom and light to her face that made it look as fresh and bright as the rest of those fair and beaming faces round.

"She is *so* much better for Dr. Fitzallan's treatment," said Mrs. Percival.

"Fitzallan!" repeated Geoffrey; "why, that's the name of Ray's unknown beauty."

"Dr. Fitzallan's wife was expected to cross on the 'City of Naples,'" said Gertrude, while Rhoda retorted laughingly:

"If she's unknown, how can you know who she is?"

"Well, she was unknown for the first few days," said Geoffrey; "then we found out she was a married woman—rather to Ray's disappointment, I think."

Mrs. Percival looked at Ray, who flushed a little and turned his head with an impatient gesture. However, he was given to reddening on the slightest provocation; although sunburnt now, he had one of those naturally fair skins which change colour almost as readily as a girl's. Women have not a monopoly of that some-

times becoming, sometimes vexatious and embarrassing, variation of colour supposed to be a special attribute of the softer sex. Many a big bearded man, older and wiser than Ray Percival, flushes to the brow under a woman's glance. So Mrs. Percival attached no especial significance to her son's heightened colour, though she was interested enough to inquire :

"Is Mrs. Fitzallan young—good-looking?"

"This boy thought so," replied Geoffrey with his wonted obtuse good humour, "but *I* didn't see much in her. Nice kind of woman enough though, I daresay. She's got lots of hair and big eyes."

"And is she a—a *flirty* sort of woman?" asked Mrs. Percival in a tone that betrayed she was ready for disapprobation.

"Flirty!" Geoffrey burst into a laugh of broad amusement. "If you can fancy Mont Blanc flirting! Sort of woman who looks as if she'd got melted snow in her veins—and not very much melted either!"

"Poor Dr. Fitzallan!" said Kate lightly.

"He's not much to be pitied," said Ray quickly, with a distant suggestion of resentment in his tone. "He has a very nice woman for a wife—one of the steady, quiet kind, with no nonsense about her."

This description set Mrs. Percival's momentarily suspicious curiosity at rest. A quiet, steady person, cold as Mont Blanc, must be a safe acquaintance for her dear boy.

"We came over with the Rockleighs," Ray presently observed, and the conversation drifted away from Mrs. Fitzallan, and ran on the Rockleigh party and the voyage for some time; then the subject of Dr. Fitzallan and his mesmeric powers, and Eileen's rapid improvement under his treatment, came up.

"Why, Mary!" exclaimed Geoffrey, evincing that he was in earnest by calling his sister "Mary," instead of by the usual family nickname; "do you mean you've been going in for that tomfoolery with this poor child?"

"You've been having Eileen mesmerized—put into trances, and all that?" added Ray, with a curiosity not far removed from disapproval.

"It has done her a great deal of good," said Mrs. Percival, prepared to take up her lines of defence. "We had tried quinine, and iron, and port wine, and sea bathing; and nothing seemed to have any effect."

"Good beef-tea and mutton-chops would do the girl more good," said Geoffrey stoutly.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, indignant at what she interpreted as an aspersion on her housekeeping. "As if she didn't have all that *too*!"

"I've heard wonderful instances of mesmeric cures," said Ray, "and I've seen some curious things too. There's no doubt it's a real power, but it's a dangerous power to play with."

"That depends on the hand that wields the power! In good hands and used for benevolent purposes, is it any more dangerous than steel or fire?" replied his mother, triumphantly quoting her now usual authority, Dr. Fitzallan.

"Seems to me," observed Geoffrey, "that either it's all humbug and nonsense, or else it's an uncanny kind of thing to have anything to do with."

"You wouldn't say it was nonsense if you had seen it with your own eyes as *we* have," said Gertrude.

"Why must a thing necessarily be uncanny because *we* have only a very imperfect comprehension of it?" rejoined Mrs. Percival. "And can it be used for a better purpose than to cure the ills that flesh is heir to?"

"Eily is ever so much stronger, certainly," put in Kate.

"And Dr. Fitzallan says it *can* do nothing but good; he only holds this power in trust, and for good and kindly uses," added Gertrude.

"And he finds wonderful clairvoyant faculties in Eily," exclaimed Rhoda; "she can see things he holds at the back of her head, and read cards and letters blindfolded!"

"Well, you can all talk fast enough about it, anyhow," remarked Geoffrey. "And the only one who hasn't put in a word is the little one herself. Come, Eily, what do *you* say to it all?"

"I do feel much better," admitted Eileen. "But, you know, I am not conscious of anything at all when I am in these sleeps. I don't seem even to dream. When I wake they tell me I have been talking and answering questions, but *I* know nothing of it—sometimes I can hardly believe it."

"This is very curious," said Ray, looking much interested. "I didn't think we had a gifted clairvoyante in the family!"

"Might come in useful if she could tell us whether Hotspur's going to win," observed Geoffrey; "I say, Eileen, couldn't you give us the straight tip? And here's Ray wants to know about those Brazilian Tramways!"

"You don't understand, Geoffrey dear," said Mrs. Percival. "She can't tell you anything but what Dr. Fitzallan knows himself and impresses on her mind. And I am sure if you could realize how much better and stronger the dear girl is, you would not disapprove of anything that is so much for her benefit."

"Oh, *I* don't disapprove if you're all pleased!" he said, shrugging his big shoulders. "Don't be setting me up as a bogie! I've no wish to interfere—if this Fitzallan's a straight, square-dealing sort of fellow, and can do Eileen good, and *you* choose to sanction it—it's not *my* business!"

"Dr. Fitzallan is a perfect gentleman, and very nice," said Mrs. Percival.

"I suppose we shall see this paragon some time," suggested

Ray, "and then we can judge for ourselves what sort of a fellow he is. We only had a minute's glimpse of him at Euston Station."

"Where paragon husband came to meet paragon wife," observed Geoffrey. "I wonder if he mesmerizes *her*?"

This idea was somehow exceedingly unpleasant to Ray; but he discreetly refrained from any expression of his sentiments, and soon the discussion was broken up, and the family party resorted to their several rooms to prepare for dinner. Mrs. Percival, unable to keep long away from her boy, hovered about his room to assure herself that all was exactly as he liked it—not that there could be much doubt about that, as she had set every detail in order with her own hands, but she could not bear to lose sight of her recovered treasure. Besides, she was conversationally inclined, and had not said out half her say downstairs. She had a host of inquiries to make about Ray's personal health, welfare and experiences during the American tour; these questions settled, she came to the subject of their fellow-voyagers.

"How curious your crossing with Mrs. Fitzallan just while we were making acquaintance with the doctor here! And you all came up from Liverpool together—you and the Rockleighs and Mrs. Fitzallan? And is Lady May Rivers really such a beauty?"

"She's very pretty," he replied indifferently. "And Geoff evidently appreciated her charms," he added, smiling.

"And *you* thought Mrs. Fitzallan so good-looking, did you, dear?" said Mrs. Percival tentatively.

"I do think her very handsome," Ray admitted frankly, with even a little defiant candour; "perhaps not the style that everybody would admire—pale and calm and statuesque. But she's more than handsome—she's a thoroughly nice woman, straightforward and unaffected—an American, but just as refined and well-bred as any English lady," he added with perfectly unconscious Philistinism. "I should like you to know her, mater."

And Mrs. Percival remembered afterwards—though not until long afterwards—that this was the first and the last time that Ray mentioned Mrs. Fitzallan's name in those frank terms of friendly liking and admiration.

"Well," she rejoined, always prompt to fall in with his wishes, "I'll ask Dr. Fitzallan to bring her to see us."

Ray did not look perfectly content with this concession. "Couldn't you call on her, mother?"

"Why, I hardly see how I could, dear, unless she intimates some wish for me to call. But if you want me to know her, darling—if you think she'd be a nice friend for us——"

"She would, I'll answer for it!" he replied promptly. "Do you think I don't know a nice, true, good woman when I see her?"

Whether Mrs. Percival had entire confidence in her son's penetration and comprehension of feminine character or not, she

at least expressed—and probably felt—no doubt of it in this case.

“Well, I’ve no doubt we shall make acquaintance,” she said. “We like her husband so much; he is a most remarkable man—and it is so wonderful, his magnetic power.”

“Is it altogether a desirable method of treatment for Eileen, do you think?” inquired Ray.

“I don’t think you’ll doubt it, dear boy, when you know Dr. Fitzallan. We all feel the most implicit confidence in him.”

“Yes, that is evident,” he observed.

“It wouldn’t be like *you*, Ray darling, to be prejudiced against a man because he has views a little in advance of the old-fashioned, purely physical treatment of pills and draughts. Of course you’ll judge for yourself; but I do think and hope you won’t disapprove of his method. He has *really* done Eileen the greatest good.”

“Well, that’s the main thing. It’s a little startling at first to find this kind of thing going on in one’s own family; but if it suits Eileen—and she’s certainly looking very well—I’d be sorry to say a word against it. Indeed, I’m very glad that Dr. Fitzallan is an able man, and has, I suppose, good prospects. Is he going to settle in London?”

The fact was that Ray, although he had a sincere regard for Eileen, was at heart more interested in the prospects of Mrs. Fitzallan’s husband than in his cousin’s case. He was glad that Eileen was improving in health, still more glad that it should be Dr. Fitzallan who brought about this improvement, and thus created a favourable impression on the family, which, discreetly encouraged, was likely to bring them into contact with his wife. Ray was certainly, under these circumstances, not likely to discourage Dr. Fitzallan’s attendance on his cousin, although at first hearing of it he had felt a little vague disapprobation of the proceeding.

Ray had a little unpacking to do before dinner; Geoffrey had none. He lived, or at least had his headquarters, in chambers, although the Percivals’ house was a second home to him, and “Geoffrey’s room” was always ready for him there. Thus, having no trunks to unpack, nor fond proud mother to hover around him; helping and talking, Geoffrey got down to the drawing-room first; but had scarcely been down a minute when Eileen joined him. She had heard his step on the stairs—she “knew that step all footsteps among”—and hurried in the last hairpin at random, that she might not lose an instant of his valuable, though not very brilliant, and as a rule neither instructive nor entertaining, society. She saw as she entered that she was first in the field, and a smile of innocent pleasure parted her lips. She was accustomed to be to Geoffrey just “one of the girls;” he generally regarded the quartette *en masse*, with almost impartial affection—

almost, not quite! He made rather special pets of Gertrude and Eileen, and to the latter it was a real and a rare treat to get Geoffrey all to herself.

He had taken up his favourite place on the hearthrug, and stood there, big and broad, in the stalwart splendour of his vigorous prime of manhood—a tower of strength he always seemed to Eileen.

A genial kindly smile beamed over his handsome Saxon face as she came towards him. Such a fragile, delicate, little "lily maid" she looked; such a depth of tender radiance shone in the dark eyes she raised half timidly to his! With the flush of innocent joy on her face, the soft, shy, trusting smile on her sensitive lips, she looked for the moment as lovely as her fair sister, the "family beauty."

"Glad to get the plagues of your life back, eh, Eily?" he said.

"So glad! It has seemed such *ages* since you went. It was horrid to have you so far away!"

"Did you think we'd be eaten by grizzly bears?" he laughed.

"One is always anxious about one's own people," she said shyly, relapsing into safe generality.

"When one's a woman, I suppose," rejoined Geoffrey, to whom anxiety about even his dearest and nearest was unknown, unless he had solid grounds for believing them to be exposed to actual danger. "It's very jolly to have one's own people to come back to after all," he added.

It was certainly pleasant to have that sweet, tender, girlish face looking up at him with shy adoration, as innocent and artless as a child's.

"Those who wait the coming rider travel twice as far as he,"

she quoted softly.

"Poetry, Baby?" he asked, with amiable patronage. "Been learning some new poems?" He sometimes called her "Baby" when he was in an unusually affectionate mood; he always treated her as if she had been a little child indeed.

"It is as true in poetry as in prose, isn't it," she said, "that the time seems longer to the women waiting at home than to men out in the world?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. It's the women waiting that make the home though." The idea sent his thoughts flying to Lady May. "Rockleigh had his wife with him on his travels, and his wife's niece too," he added.

"Lady May Rivers? Yes! And is she so very lovely, Geoffrey?"

"That's just what she is—a lovely woman."

"And Dr. Fitzallan's wife—is *she* as pretty?"

"You wouldn't name them in the same breath. You'd as soon compare a—*a* rose to a snowflake!"

"Why, Geoff, it is *you* who are poetical!" said Eileen, with a smile of surprise. Never had she known Geoffrey to plunge so recklessly into simile before, and on the subject of women's charms too! "I should very much like to see these two contrasted beauties," she added.

"I should like you to know Lady May," he said.

The sound of opening doors above warned Eileen that her time was short; their *tête-à-tête* was nearly at an end; she had something she wished to say, and only a minute to say it in.

"I want to see Mrs. Fitzallan too," she began, hastily making that name a stepping-stone, "because of the doctor, her husband, you know. Geoffrey, please tell me. You don't—you don't mind my being mesmerized, do you? Because if you—if you don't approve—" she hesitated appealingly.

"Well, Baby, of course I don't want to put a stop to anything that's for your good. I'm glad to see you so much better; but it's impossible for me to come to any fixed opinion till I've seen and know a little more of this new doctor and his ways of treatment. If I come to the conclusion that it's not wise nor well for you, Eily, I'm sure you won't be obstinate about it."

"I will stop it to-morrow, Geoff, if you say so. Don't I always do what you wish?"

"Yes, you're a very good sensible child, Eily; we've never had any trouble with you."

She smiled gratefully and happily.

Even this moderate meed of praise from Geoffrey was sweet. The mildest expressions of appreciation from him were so rare, she prized them as if his lips dropped pearls.

Then Gertrude came in, her fair sedate face brightening as she looked at her brother; then Kate and Rhoda raced downstairs; lastly Ray and his mother appeared, Mrs. Percival beaming with a possessive air of perfect bliss.

Meanwhile Dr. Fitzallan and his wife were enjoying their first domestic *tête-à-tête* after their temporary separation. He had taken part of a furnished house in one of the west-central squares. It did not look very home-like as yet; the carpets were shabby, the curtains faded; the furniture was stiff and sombre, its general arrangement rectangular; even the pictures on the walls, the large gilt clock on the mantelpiece, flanked by a pair of gay floral-patterned vases, had the unhome-like air of furnished apartments. But a woman's presence seldom fails to stamp something of character almost immediately on any room of which she takes possession; and already the mere presence of Mrs. Fitzallan, settled and at home, with her bonnet off and a flower pinned in her dress, seemed to change the whole atmosphere, and to give a touch of the *home* aspect to the dingy rooms, which were really very clean, as clean as London smoke would permit them to be.

Dr. Fitzallan looked at his wife, and felt that her arrival was

distinctly an improvement on the former situation; there was a certain sense of satisfaction in having her back with him, to look after his comforts and make his residence home. She was a good manager, and would keep things in order. Women had their uses certainly; they were sometimes ornamental too. Although her husband of several years, he acknowledged this to himself as he looked at Asenath, tall and fair and graceful, in her pretty, well-fitting dark-blue dress, with a white rose on her bosom.

"Well, Asenath," he said, laying his hand on her shoulder with a coldly caressing gesture, "are you at all glad to be with me again?"

"Of course I am glad, Gervas," she answered gently but calmly. She looked up in his face and smiled, but the smile, though carefully soft and kind, had no heart-warmth in it. He moved his hand away from her shoulder impatiently.

"Glad!" he echoed. "Glad or sad is all the same to you! Always the same frigid lifelessness! A man might as well have married a snow figure."

"Better, perhaps. *She* would have melted! and *I* am, unfortunately, substantial," she replied quietly. Then she added in a conciliatory tone, laying her hand lightly on his arm, "I do not mean to be cold, Gervas, but you know it is not my way to be demonstrative."

"I should think I did know it!" he said with a curling lip. "Well, I suppose you are as you were born; man can't alter what Nature has made; and after all you may be of more help to me than a snow image could be. Come, now, tell me about your fellow-travellers. That big fair fellow—what's his name?—Carresford; did you see much of *him*?"

"Not very much. I saw more of the other, his nephew, Mr. Percival. He was very kind. Mr. Carresford was always about with the Rockleighs."

"Yes; and now, these Rockleighs? They were civil to you, eh?"

"Yes; Lady May Rivers was especially pleasant."

"I hope you cultivated them, Asenath? Such chances are not to be let slip carelessly. They may be useful to us. We want to make a position for ourselves here; and the acquaintance of people of their class is just what may turn out a very valuable support and help to us."

"I had not looked at it in that light," she observed quietly.

"No, I dare say not," her husband retorted. "You are always utterly unpractical! a curious combination of the unpractical and the cold. Most cold-hearted, unemotional women have cool, calculating heads; but you, with no more warmth about you than a stone, have just as little balance of hard level sense as the most hysterical of puling sentimentalists."

"I am sorry I am of such an unsatisfactory disposition," she said. A moment's silence, and then she sighed—a sudden painful sigh

—and added more hesitatingly, with an earnest look in her large clear eyes, “I wish—I wish we could understand one another better, Gervas! Perhaps we do not either of us do the other justice.”

“I do *you* justice enough, Asenath,” he interrupted. “I admit that you are without one redeeming vice!”

“That is scant justice,” she replied, flushing; “I think you do *not* understand me, and perhaps I don’t really understand you. I only wish I could be sure whether I do or not.”

“Oh, you understand me just well enough,” he rejoined bitterly, “to know that I am not what you want me to be; not cut out exactly on your pattern to suit your delicate fastidious taste, to move and breathe and live and have all my being according to your squeamish scruples. You should not have married mortal flesh and blood, Asenath!” he said, with a flash of fierce and impatient scorn. “You expect a man to be just what you are yourself—a model waxwork figure, animated by the correctest moral machinery!”

She shut her lips and turned away silently. In a few minutes she observed quietly and pleasantly that she had a good deal of unpacking to do, and slipped out of the room. She busied herself over her trunks for some time; but when after an hour or so Dr. Fitzallan came in search of her, she was no longer devoted to the task of unpacking. Weary with the day’s travelling, tired, too, with bending herself double over her boxes, she was sitting in a low chair, leaning her arm on the table, her cheek upon her hand. She had let down her hair to brush, but the brush lay neglected in her lap; she had drifted into a reverie and sat there lost in thought—though it was no day dream of love and joy, of peace and home-coming, in which she was absorbed, so absorbed that she hardly heard her husband’s step in the passage; this, however, was not much wonder, as he habitually moved with a tread as noiseless as a panther’s.

“Tired, Asenath?” he said.

“A little,” she admitted.

“Why don’t you look up at me when you speak to me?” he inquired; and putting his hand under her chin he raised her face. Something was shining suspiciously about her long eyelashes—something she had not had time to brush away.

“Your eyes are wet,” he observed. “Have you hurt yourself? or have you the tooth-ache? Nothing else would make *you* cry.”

“Then I suppose I have the tooth-ache, though I was not aware of it,” she replied quietly.

He looked at the loosened hair which streamed over her shoulders. No light feathery locks like rippling sunshine were hers; but heavy sombre waves of seaweed brown.

“Do you remember that poem of Browning’s, ‘Porphyria’s Lover,’” he said abruptly, “where the man twists all the woman’s

hair round her neck and strangles her with it? Your hair's long enough and thick enough, Asenath," he added with a curious slow smile, gathering the soft, abundant brown tresses together in his hand. "I could treat you like Porphyria, couldn't I?"

She showed no uneasiness at the grim form of jesting which some weak sisters might have found unpleasant.

A little pink flush crept into her cheeks; a shadow of a smile curved her lips; her grey eyes looked up steadily, fearlessly, into his, which were fixed on her with a kind of sinister gleam.

"I like you better so, Gervas," she said, "than when you are bitter and sarcastic with me!"

"Because you know very well that I shall not hurt you," he rejoined; "unless—unless some day you provoke me too far."

(*To be continued*)

FROM BIKANIR TO BAGDAD.

A HOT WEATHER JOURNEY IN 1888.

FEW people in England, I fancy, know much of Bagdad even from books, and fewer still have visited the place, so perhaps my first impressions of it may be of some interest. I say advisedly my first impressions, for they are so much sharper and clearer cut than those that follow, which are inevitably mixed up and dulled by one's daily surroundings and the ideas gathered from others, that before long it is impossible to say which are one's own ideas and which are those unconsciously assimilated.

I will begin, however, from the beginning and describe our starting point and journey, and although to the many travellers of these days the latter may seem trifling, still it took us four weeks to accomplish, and those four weeks comprised some of the hottest days of an Indian hot weather, so that it was no trifle to me even after twenty years of eastern life.

If few people know Bagdad I may safely assume that fewer still have heard of Bikanir, a district which in maps usually occupies a blank space, described vaguely as the desert of India. But though few know the place by name, thousands must have seen and admired the beautiful red, black and gold lacquered screen of Bikanir work which formed one of the attractions of the Indian annexe in the Colinderies of 1886. Personally, I felt an intense interest in that work of art, having watched its development from the earliest stage when the first drawings of it were spread out in our verandah for the "Mem Sahib's" gracious approval, until it appeared a thing of beauty in the exhibition. Bikanir is the most northern of the states of Rajputana and is immediately south of the Punjab and Scinde. During many months of the year I am bound to admit that the term desert is fitly applied to it, but a very few inches of rain suffice to transform the yellow sand into a prairie of long waving lovely grass, which during three or four months feeds thousands of sheep and large herds of cattle. Having lived in Bikanir for two years and seen much of the country, and having taken a very deep interest in all its concerns, I have a real affection for its vast plains and miles of low rolling sandhills, although until lately I thought it was undoubtedly the very ugliest spot on earth.

Rumours of a line of railway through Bikanir are now afloat,

but at present there is not even a road, and our journey of 150 miles from the capital to the nearest railway station in an adjoining State was performed in a carriage drawn by six camels, which were changed every ten miles.

We started on the night of the 25th of May, a day on which the thermometer stood at 115° in the shade. A brilliant full moon enabled us to dispense with the usual flaring, evil-smelling torches, which two men riding in front on wretched ponies carry on iron prongs strongly resembling Britannia's trident. Our camels had been sent out ten miles, and that distance we traversed rapidly and in great state, the carriage being drawn by ten horses, so that I imagine our feelings were somewhat akin to those of the people who drive a circus into a country town. The number of horses was on account of the heavy sand to be driven through, and as it was, we were all but turned over in a high drift and had to get out and walk over it while the ten horses plunged and kicked and tied themselves into knots in the effort of backing out and climbing over the drift some easier way.

Even a good camel does not attain to much speed as a beast of draught, and four miles an hour was a fair average. Oh, those six weary nights, shall I ever forget them? We started about 11 p.m. and went on till 3, 4 or 5 in the morning, and in spite of travelling only at night the heat was excessive and the burning wind hardly abated. We were fortunate, however, in not meeting with what we were in nightly dread of, namely, "ādis," or sand storms, which are frequent at that time of the year in these plains. During an "ādi" the wind suddenly rises with tremendous force, carrying with it dense clouds of sand and whirling them round in all directions, making it nearly as dark as night in the middle of the day. When travellers meet these storms the only thing to be done is to lie down and cover up the head, and we often discussed the probability of our having to do this.

The carriage was arranged for lying down, and we had goodly store of pillows, but of what avail were they when one's progress was one continual jolt, bump and lurch, and when every man of the six camel drivers was engaged in urging on "my brother," as they call their animals, at the top of his voice, and with a large expenditure of energy in whacking the unfortunate creature? I used to hope that the blows fell chiefly on the harness, and I believe they did; anyhow it is the custom of the camel driver never to remain quiet for a single instant, and the head man, who as it were led the yelling chorus, became absolutely hoarse and unable to speak by the second night. Sleep to me was out of the question, although my husband managed to secure a fair amount, and was positive that if I only lay still as he did, I should sleep too. The feminine head is, however, made of different materials, and the jolting that seems to lull a man to sleep, gives a woman a racking headache. By day we lived in very small rest houses built for the use of

travellers, but the heat in them was too great for any rest or comfort. One day we passed in the palace of a native nobleman, who did all in his power to make us comfortable, but the rooms were tiny, and the heat even greater than elsewhere. I was amused at my bath here, which was prepared in a tall brass cylinder, the original use of which I could not imagine. On arriving at the railway we were "trolled" over the Sambhur salt lake at four in the morning, and how I enjoyed those two hours! After the jolting of the camel carriage it was the very poetry of motion, and in future I shall cherish with affection the remembrance of that hard uncompromising iron seat.

We were two nights and a day in the train going down to Bombay, an experience which gave us a new insight into the nature of heat. We spent the whole day sucking ice and putting wet handkerchiefs on our heads, and on that of our little dog, who I think would have died but for this care. As we reached Bombay in the earliest dawn, a vision of a brilliant flush of red made me sit up and look out, when I found it was caused by our passing at the little stations trees of the Gold Mohr or Pomciana Regia in full flower, quite covered with their splendid flame-coloured blossoms. Bombay is full of these lovely trees, and I almost forgot the misery of the oppressive ante-monsoon heat in the pleasure of driving out and seeing them. In the early evening one tree would light up a small street by its brilliant colour. In Bombay our constitutions had at least such benefit as could be derived from a change in the quality, if not the quantity of heat. Up country it was of the fierce dry burning sort, here it was of the dense moist windless kind; and as it is the vanity of Bombay to believe firmly that in such a delightful climate punkahs are superfluous, except just at meals when of course the coffee or soup may make you hot, our two nights there were spent in misery instead of sleep.

From Bombay we resumed our journey in a small British India mail steamer, the "Purulia," of 1,500 tons. It was very rough during the 48 hours we took to reach Karachi, and as all the ports were closed, it was absolutely impossible to remain two minutes below, for the heat was stifling; so the other ladies and I lay on deck, and by degrees got over our sea-sickness. The boat was very crowded, and the whole deck at night was covered with passengers mixed together in the most promiscuous manner, without any attempt at dividing the ladies and gentlemen; but the ladies at any rate were far too miserable to think of such trifles, and none undressed or troubled themselves as to what was going on.

We landed at Karachi, and drove some miles to the military station, which struck me as being a very bare, desolate-looking spot, on sandy desert-like ground. We were most kindly entertained by the Director of Telegraphs, and I much admired his very

pretty garden and plant-houses, which showed what could be done even in such an unpromising soil. On leaving Karachi and all except one other European passenger behind, we encountered a rough sea for about 18 hours; but after this we had none to complain of, and could devote such energies as remained to us in abusing the heat, and endeavouring to find out the coolest, or rather the least heated portions of the deck. Our feelings came to a crisis next day at Muscat, in whose harbour it was our fate to be anchored for a night and half. Words fail me to describe the heat there; I only know it fairly frightened me, and I did not dare to sleep, for an attack of heat apoplexy seemed the most likely thing in the world to occur. I quite sympathized with the view of an Arab passenger, who said to my husband: "Muscat is a city of the devil." To show that my fears were not groundless I may mention that only two nights previously the heat had been still greater, and an officer and several men of H.M.S. *Turquoise*, lying at anchor in the harbour, had died of it, while many men and officers were still on the sick list. Two young middies came on board for the ship's mails, and we felt so sorry for English boys to be exposed to such a climate. There was no air, and it seemed as if one could not breathe the intensely heated atmosphere. How thankful I was when our anchor was weighed at one the next day, and how devoutly I wished never to see again the semicircle of black barren rocks which forms the harbour of Muscat.

Bunder Abbas was the next stopping place; there we met the out-going steamer for Bombay, and posted our English letters. It is on the Persian coast, and does not look interesting, being very barren and desolate, with one long row of mud houses along the beach. Singah, the next port, is rather prettier, with a background of hills and a long fringe of date palms. From there we crossed the gulf in a rough sea to Bahrein on the Arabian side, where the celebrated pearl fisheries are. The islands are so low one cannot see them until the steamer is quite close, when a dense line of date palms gradually appears. H.M.S. *Ranger* was stationed here, and one of her boats was at once sent off to us for the mails; but, unfortunately, these had been left in Muscat in the care of the captain of the "*Turquoise*," as the "*Ranger*" had been expected down in those parts, so there must have been great disappointment on board. From Bahrein we re-crossed to Bushire, on the Persian side of the gulf. We landed there in a small steam launch, and spent the day very pleasantly with the kind and hospitable wife and family of the Resident, who was himself absent, to our great regret. In returning on board the "*Purulia*" in the evening the sea, which had been like oil in the morning, was most unpleasantly rough. The way that little cockleshell of a launch jumped and rolled and tumbled over the big waves was most disagreeable to a timid sailor, and I was very thankful to find

myself once more on the deck of something larger and more substantial.

The only first-class passengers remaining on board the steamer besides ourselves, after Muscat, were six Arabs; one the Sheikh of Kowait, and the others horse dealers of those parts returning from Bombay. We all had to sleep on deck the whole of the voyage, for when I put a thermometer in my cabin one evening, thinking the heat something above the average, it marked 112°; and at first I did not fancy our having to share the saloon hatch with two of these men, but I was really agreeably surprised to find what thorough gentlemen they were, so I soon became quite used to them, and thought nothing of it. They had no disagreeable habits, and never stared at you or made themselves unpleasant in any way. The sheikh was a well-bred looking man, with good features; but the others were of a commoner caste. One or two of them were very particular in going through their prayers at the appointed times, and did so even when it was very rough, and the constant getting up and down from their knees required in Mussulman devotions must have been a work of difficulty. They were most civil, and made us a handsome present of Turkish delight and splendid mangoes, and on one occasion I was asked to take a cup of their coffee. It was very nasty, being immensely strong and flavoured with some spice; but happily there was not much of it, and I think and hope I got it down without allowing the muscles of my mouth to lapse into the expression of disgust they were endeavouring to form. The day after leaving Bushire our Arabs departed, several boats coming about 40 miles from land to meet and take them off. It was amusing to watch the greetings when their friends came on board; every one kissed every one else—not French fashion, on the cheeks—but well on their thick and moustached lips, with a good sounding smack. The sheikh, however, was greeted in more respectful fashion—his followers knelt and kissed his hand and rubbed their heads against his arm in a cat-like manner. Our steamer was now anchored at the bar, and we had to wait until the tide rose and we could float into the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab, as the river formed by the union of the Euphrates and Tigris is called. This was for many miles very wide, and the low banks were hardly visible; but gradually it narrowed, and we became aware that we had really left the sea. By-and-by we passed the solitary telegraph station of Fao, and on stopping to land the mails we heard the sad news of the death of the Emperor of Germany, which had taken place the previous day. In this melancholy fashion we resumed our connection with European affairs, a subject which I think the heat had nearly driven out of our minds.

It is quite curious, by the way, to note how very engrossing a subject heat is. When it gets to a certain point, one is always turning it round so to speak, and looking at it in every possible light, and

anxiously inquiring into every one else's experience ; in fact nothing but a strong cool breeze suffices to turn the attention elsewhere. Personally, I am prepared to put up patiently with an atmosphere of 90° in the house, after that I begin to protest and think longingly of the delights of 72°, which to some people I know in England is a very fearful experience indeed.

By ten at night the river was much narrower, and both banks were lined with date palms. On passing Mohamrah, on the Persian side, our steamer fired a gun by way of salute to the sheikh of the place, and soon afterwards we anchored a little below Busrah for the remainder of the night. At dawn we steamed on to the port, for the town of Busrah is two or three miles from the river, up one of the many creeks which open out all the way along, and there we had to remain one day in quarantine. We landed the next morning, and spent the day with the consul ; at least, I passed it on a bed, having a slight attack of fever from, I suppose, the change of climate, for Busrah is a damp, unhealthy place. In the evening we said good-bye to the very pleasant and amusing captain of the "Purulia," who had done all in his power to mitigate the severities of the weather and to keep up our spirits. But in spite of his efforts, I think the only individual who really enjoyed the voyage was our little fox-terrier, Tip ; as in the early part of it he killed five rats, and the rest of the way he spent all his waking hours in sniffing about for further victims, while in default of finding them, he one day caught and shook to death a remarkably fine cockroach—which seemed, however, to disagree with him. We afterwards went on board the "Kalifeh," one of the fine river steamers which run weekly between Bagdad and Busrah, taking with us a small addition to the family, in the shape of Tot, a very pretty little wife for Tip, who had been given to us during the day. The consul most thoughtfully insisted on sending on board the very comfortable spring-bed on which I had been lying during the day. I thought this almost superfluous at the time, but when the Bagdad form of bed dawned upon me, I did indeed feel grateful, especially as I was more or less ill all the way up the river. To enjoy a Bagdad bed a person should be comfortably stout or gifted with unfailing powers of sleep. It is all boards, and the mattress is just an afterthought ; in fact, for natives of the place a small mat covering the boards is all that is thought necessary, but to an individual so conservative as to have even retained a kindly feeling towards feather-beds, and whose gifts in the matter of sleep are small, it is an object of unmitigated horror.

We steamed up during the night between banks thickly lined with date palms, and about four in the morning stopped at Kurnah to take in bales of wool. This is the confluence of the two great rivers, and here tradition places the site of the Garden of Eden. It is so flat and ugly that I cannot believe it, nor was this impression the least shaken when a branch from the "Tree of the Knowledge

of Good and Evil" was presented to me. I have always pictured that tree as a lovely one, with beautiful tempting fruit growing on it, but this was only a bit of a "sirrees," a common Indian tree with no fruit at all, only long, dry seed pods, which rattle in the hot winds with the most irritating sound. The Garden of Eden *must* have been beautiful, while this part of the world is certainly not so; and as all evidence is in favour of no great change having come over it, I decline to believe in this site, and have at once and for ever gone over to the theory that the North Pole was the real cradle of the human race.

The distance from Busrah to Bagdad by river is 500 miles, although the real distance is only 300, but a glance at the map will show what extraordinary turns and twists the Tigris takes. The sun is consequently sometimes in front and sometimes behind or at either side, and one cannot sit in the same place on deck for ten minutes at a time. I experienced great disappointment on this voyage. I had hoped to see a well-cultivated wooded landscape, but alas! the reality showed me a flat, absolutely treeless, uncultivated waste, for at least 400 miles up the river. Never again will I do Bikanir the injustice of saying, as I have so often done, that no country could be uglier. It did its best, it had no river, not the least little streamlet in all its length and breadth; its wells are 250 feet deep and more, yet every village had fine and sometimes beautiful trees, and the prospect in parts was diversified by numerous sandhills, while Mesopotamia, with this splendid river running through it, is a barren plain. The one country has, so to say, the ugliness of nature, but this has the far greater ugliness of neglect. We passed numberless Arab encampments on the way up, wretched-looking places with the most forlorn huts of mats and grass, or occasionally the ragged black Bedouin tent. The inhabitants seemed suited to their abodes, and looked half savage; indeed, clothes were evidently not considered by all to be necessities of life.

The navigation of the Tigris is a difficult matter, for the quantity of sand it brings down is always causing new shoals and altering the set of the current, so that the whole 500 miles has to be learnt and studied as Mark Twain describes his study of the Mississippi; only in this case I think it must be even more difficult, for there are absolutely no salient points to fix the memory. The banks of the river are very low, and after sunset, when both sky and river partook of the same pearly hues, they gave one the impression of being merely a line ruled on the sky. Occasionally we passed a little town, a collection of mud huts with a Turkish fort; and at one of these, where no steamer had called for some months, the whole population came down to inspect the boat, many of them wading into the water to get a nearer view. I noticed amongst the dark skins some very much fairer women and children, with really dark red

hair, not the least carrot red, but the darkest chestnut red—a shade, in fact, I had never before seen.

On the fourth morning, Friday, the 22nd of June, we passed very early the ruins of the Arch of Clesiphon, the sole remaining monument of two great cities, Clesiphon and Seleucia, on either side of the river. This I hope to see by-and-by, but cannot describe here. Afterwards the excitement became great, for in an hour or two we should be at the end of our long journey, and in the world-renowned city of the caliphs. The banks began to lose their desolate look, and there were gardens and date groves, and even occasionally a thicket of willows; while by-and-by houses began to appear, the country houses of the rich people of the city. The river here makes an immense bend, and on rounding it I was told Bagdad was visible. All I saw at first was a very unromantic-looking factory chimney, with clouds of black smoke coming out of it; this I subsequently learnt was the bakery of the Turkish soldiers; but by degrees minarets appeared and a long broken line of houses on our right; on our left, groves of date palms interspersed with houses, and in the distance, a bridge of boats. The steamer stopped opposite our new home, I and the mails were quickly landed, and our voyage was a thing of the past.

IMPRESSIONS OF BAGDAD.

To the newly-arrived resident in Bagdad the Tigris is undoubtedly the great feature of the place. It is a splendid river—broad, deep, and even now, when it is comparatively low, with a very swift current, which increases at flood times, I am told, to seven knots an hour. It is of a yellow, tawny hue, due to the quantities of sand it brings down, but this mixture, I fondly hope, acts in some way as a disinfectant; for I shudder to think of the otherwise polluted condition of the only drinking water in the place. All refuse of every description is simply thrown into the river. I have already casually observed the unpleasant corpses of two dogs and a sheep floating down; and at first I could not reconcile myself to drinking the water; but when filtered it is clear and even remarkably good. Since I have arranged to have the water used in this house taken from the middle of the river, where it is far cleaner and the current is strongest, and also to have it boiled before filtering, my mind has not dwelt quite so much on typhoid fever.

The traffic on the river is curious and interesting; the chief means of transport is the “gouffa,” a boat of most peculiar construction. It is perfectly round and made of osiers neatly bound together and then covered outside with a thick coating of bitumen. It bulges out all round in the middle, and the top part turns slightly over towards the inside, and is used as a seat by those who do not either stand or sit at the bottom. Occasionally I observe a chair or stool used in a gouffa by a superior kind of

passenger. Many of our nursery stories are said to come from the East, and the instant my eyes fell for the first time on a gouffa, I felt that here was the evident origin of the rhyme so well known to children: "Three wise men of Gotham went to sea in a bowl," &c. For Gotham, substitute Bagdad, and the thing explains itself; for here the wise men, and doubtless the foolish also, do go in a bowl every day, and have done so for centuries past. Occasionally, I hear, the bowl is over-weighted and sinks to the bottom.

But the gouffa suggests to me a still older and more classical story. It is inferred from modern research that the Greeks borrowed the idea of the Styx and Charon from the Assyrians; and to any one seeing a gouffa being paddled across the river in the dusk of the evening by a figure standing up dark against the sky line, it is a matter of instant belief that the ancient fable is being enacted before one's very eyes.

A sight that has not yet ceased to cause me surprise is that of a large Arab boat, filled with neatly packed firewood till it resembles nothing but an enormous stack, dragged by main force up the river and against the stream for several hundred miles by the unfortunate crew, about seven in number, who take the work in turns. A long rope is fastened to the top of the mast, and to this the men are harnessed with broad bands of plaited straw which go over their chests. They take, I am told, six weeks to come up to Bagdad, so it is evident that time and human labour are not of much account in these parts.

There are many bathing places along the river, one indeed very close to our garden; and bathing and swimming go on from the earliest dawn until darkness sets in, but the noise seems greatest in the afternoon and evening, when the bathers are chiefly boys, who evidently enjoy themselves most thoroughly, always taking advantage of any Arab boat which may be anchored alongside the shore to climb up as high as they can amongst its spars, and jump into the water, doing this over and over again. In the early morning you see twenty or thirty men crowded together in a gouffa, and after getting into the middle of the river they jump off one by one and swim long distances, the gouffa following and picking them up if they are tired. We hear those who bathe are chiefly Jews.

The river is always a pleasant sight, and gives an idea of coolness on the hottest day, though practically it makes little difference in the heat; but in the evening it is really lovely. The sun sets behind the bridge of boats in a glory of red and yellow, and soon grey pearly tints show themselves along the line of water, to be succeeded as night draws on by the long lance-like reflections of the lights in the opposite houses and on the bridge; or perhaps the moon is lighting up everything, and turning the tall date palms and more especially the mud houses and walls to a

beauty certainly not their own. The atmosphere is so clear here that the number of stars visible and the brightness of them is quite remarkable. It is little wonder that the Chaldeans of old turned their attention to astronomy, with this marvellous moving panorama ever before them. The Milky Way is especially brilliant and on a dark moonless night one sees a distinct reflection of it thrown across the river.

I often see lights floating down the river in the evening, and find it is a Mahomedan custom, when any one is ill, to fasten a candle on a piece of wood and put it on the water; if the light goes out quickly the person will die, but if it keeps in as long as the turn in the river enables you to see it, he will recover. I wonder if the candle ever receives a gentle hint to extinguish itself quickly, by being put on insecurely or crookedly?

I must now go on to more prosaic matters and endeavour to make my readers understand something of this curious place. Our house is very centrally situated on the river, with the city behind and at each side; in fact it is so enclosed that I feel rather like a prisoner, for, unless obliged to do so, no lady would wish to walk in the streets, and to get into the country, or desert as it is called here, without doing so, the river must be crossed. There is, however, a long narrow strip of garden on the river front between it and the house in which are three rows of tall orange trees, and which like all gardens so situated here is called "mesaniah;" and across the road behind is another larger garden where there is a tennis court. In these two gardens my personal interest and amusement will chiefly centre, and as the soil is excellent and water abundant, I fancy anything in the way of flowers and vegetables can be grown with ease. I have visions, which are already beginning to take practical shape, of a smooth green bit of English lawn under those orange trees and of beautiful Maréchal Niel roses from India, which will add their perfume to that of the orange blossoms. There is plenty of fruit in Bagdad, or rather in its neighbourhood, but it greatly needs cultivation. There are grapes of all kinds in abundance, some quite equal in size, shape, and colour to English hot-house fruit, but without its flavour. Then again, the nectarines have a fine flavour, but there is nothing of them to eat, they are almost all stone. I often think what wonders a good Scotch gardener could effect here with this abundance of water, fertile soil, a climate to ripen anything, and the original of almost all fruit trees to work upon.

The house is a large native building in two divisions, each surrounding a court-yard, the inner one having been the harem. It contains many rooms of all shapes and sizes and on various levels; the greater part of these are empty. On the ground floor are the "sirdabs," semi-underground rooms much used by Bagdad people in the hot weather, but these unfortunately are out of repair and too damp for us to inhabit, although they are used as offices. The

room I have chosen for my own use is a most curious specimen of Bagdad ornamentation; the ceiling, and half-way down the walls, are composed of pieces of looking-glass arranged in geometrical designs, while the lower half of the white walls is alternately composed of a small recess and a square of looking-glass. I may mention that the quality of the glass is such, that no feminine occupant of the apartment in question would wish to look at herself twice. One end of the room is entirely glazed from the ceiling to half-way down the walls and the other end looking on the river is of lattice work which can be closed by shutters. The heat in this, and indeed in all the rooms, is far greater than in any forcing house I ever entered; in fact during the four hot months the house is absolutely uninhabitable. We never go into it except to dress, and are obliged to live entirely in two little rooms called "chirdakhs" built in the garden close to the river, which have an arrangement for cooling them. This consists of one side of each room being filled up with lattice work on which camel-thorn is fastened and kept constantly wetted. This is a substitute for the sweet-smelling "cuscus" grass used for the same purpose in India, and a poor one it is, as it does not retain the moisture and smells like the strongest senna tea. The heat of Bagdad is intense during July and August when the dates ripen, but after that we hear it will gradually cool down and we may expect many months of delightful weather. The heat appears far more severe than in India, because there our houses are built with a view to resisting it and keeping it out. Here the idea seems to be to take in the heat and make the most of it, to cherish it and never let it go. The court-yards are just wells of heated air which any cool breeze has the greatest difficulty in penetrating, while the sun pours its rays down on them the whole day long. There are two peculiarities in Bagdad houses painful to a stranger; one is the immense height of the steps of the stairs, which in some instances are twice the height, and in others quite a third higher than what one is used to. Until I came here I never knew how fondly one's nether limbs cling to the traditions of their youth. The other peculiar feature is the lowness of the doorway, which causes a person "great of stature," as a rustic in England described the rather unusual height of a young lady friend of mine, to receive many blows on the head until experience has taught the necessity of abasing oneself.

In Bagdad every one sleeps on the roofs of the houses during the hot season, indeed it would be quite impossible to sleep inside. Early rising is consequently less a virtue than a necessity here, and 5 o'clock, on which I have decided as a happy medium, is considered quite a late hour to be in bed by the more experienced European inhabitants, who rise at three or four and go out riding or boating. For the greater part of the summer it is cool and pleasant at night, but during the very hottest season the nights

are terrible, and I find that the unpleasant sensations I have experienced of fluttering at the heart and a difficulty in breathing, are very common even amongst the natives themselves.

Bagdad has one super-excellent manufacture which does much for the comfort of its inhabitants during these dreadful nights. A particular kind of light-coloured clay found here is made into vessels of various shapes and sizes to contain water; it is slightly porous, and the effect of putting one of these vases out in the burning wind is to cool the water in it nearly as well as ice could do, so that in the hottest night the poorest person can secure a deliciously cool draught. Ice also is obtainable, and is the greatest comfort. The roofs are not only used as bedrooms, but in the evening visitors are received on them, and many people dine on them, but the lights attract so many insects that I think it is preferable to dine in the "chirdakh." I mentioned that there was a road at the back of the house. The first time I crossed it I looked upon it as merely a dirty bye-lane, so my astonishment was proportionately great on learning that it was the principal and the widest street in Bagdad! I have since then walked through other streets to return some calls, and perceive the truth of the above statement, difficult as it was to believe at first. The streets here are simply filthy alleys or gutters, being frequently considerably depressed in the centre. We measured the width of an ordinary one and found it six feet, while the blank walls of houses on each side were twenty or thirty feet high. This narrow space is crowded with people, and donkeys, and men on horseback, and many dogs, alive and occasionally dead or at the last gasp from disease. If the donkeys are large and white they are usually ridden, if small and black they have enormous bundles of grass, or wood, or what not laid across their backs, and absolutely fill the streets, so that it is necessary to flatten oneself against the wall or take refuge in a doorway. We are always preceded and followed in the streets by men to clear the way before us and keep people from riding over us behind, and this is a necessary precaution. There are no carriages in Bagdad except one belonging to the pasha; every one walks or rides. Until late years I believe no Englishwoman went into the streets without veiling herself in Turkish fashion, but now one's dress excites little remark. The word *veil* conveys an erroneous notion to the English mind, as it conjures up the idea of something thin or transparent. The garment the women here cover themselves with is a sheet rather than a veil in our sense of the word; among the better classes it is of a heavy make of silk, generally in two colours, often white and gold, and very handsome and expensive, while the poor women wear dark striped cotton things of the same description. A gauze veil or thin handkerchief is worn over the face and the sheet is drawn over the head and pinned to the head-dress. This latter is peculiar, and consists of a sort of bright coloured cap, or sometimes a hand-

kerchief fastened tightly over the hair, which is plaited in two tails and hangs down the back. The Jewesses wear a piece of black buckram, which falls over the face in the street, is thrown back in the house and is particularly ugly and ungraceful looking. They also wear long light-yellow leather boots. The dress of the men, except those who affect European-cut clothes, is a long white or coloured cotton dressing-gown reaching to the ankles; this crosses in front and is kept in place by a belt. These belts are rather a speciality of the place and some are very pretty. One's servants and respectable people generally wear a shirt, with perhaps an embroidered front, and trowsers under this; but the poor people are content to dispense with, at any rate, the shirt. The fez is usually worn, except among the Arabs, who have their own peculiar head-dress of a folded coloured handkerchief bound round the head with a thick rope of camels' hair. Indoors the ladies of Bagdad wear a very pretty garment called a "hashmi," which is at once simple, cool and graceful. If this is transparent it is worn over a kind of glorified night-dress, the bottom of which is trimmed like a petticoat and the neck and sleeves perhaps worked with gold thread, but a thicker one could be worn over anything. I see in my favourite paper, *The Lady*, that a Bond Street dress-maker has been introducing a novel form of tea-gown, modified from an Arab design, so this may possibly be some form of the "hoshmi."

Arabic is of course the language of the country, and I must say it is not one which commends itself to the ear; it is so harsh and guttural, and the tones of voice used are such as lead one frequently to suppose that a fight is imminent, although probably nothing but the most amiable sentiments are being expressed. I have had visits from some native ladies who only spoke Arabic or Persian, when of course an interpreter is required, but some speak French, and as there are now several girls' schools taught by French nuns, that language will become more general amongst the young Christian women. At all visits it is customary for black coffee, in the tiniest doll's cups, and sherbet, to be handed round; to men cigarettes and pipes of different kinds are also offered.

There is one great drawback to a residence in Bagdad, namely, that with few exceptions every one sooner or later suffers from the Bagdad boil, or date mark, as it is sometimes called from the fancied resemblance of the scar to a date stone. All children born in Bagdad get it and usually on the face, but older people coming here are rarely attacked there, but have it on their hands, arms or legs instead. A bad one lasts from one to two years and though unpleasant to look at is said not to be especially painful. There is no remedy for it, and indeed the best plan is to leave it quite alone. I am told there are two distinct varieties of this boil, distinguished by the Bagdadis as the male and female kinds. The male sort comes as a red swelling, gradually increases in size and

after some months goes off without any particular trouble ; the female boil on the contrary is of the most vicious kind, and develops into an open running sore very difficult to heal. Nothing is really known of the cause of these boils ; one theory I have read is that they are the outcome of the accumulated unhealthiness of any city which has been originally built on the site of an older and probably equally populous and unsanitary one. Any way, I take it, they are one of nature's protests against the concentrated filthiness common to eastern cities ; and, also, no amount of care and cleanliness in one's individual personal premises can shield a European from the effects of this chronic disregard of sanitary rules. Bagdad is also subject to visitations of the real ancient form of plague, and so lately as eleven years ago thousands died of it. From these facts I am inclined to the belief that Bagdad holds the proud position of supremacy in the widespread kingdom of dirt, though doubtless many other eastern towns could make a good fight for it.

In referring, however, to such subjects as the plague I feel that I am going beyond my original intention, and had better bring these remarks to a close ; merely reminding my readers that they are really and truly the first impressions of what I have personally seen and heard during the six weeks I have been here, and that I make no pretence to deep research.

Q U I T E T R U E .

By MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE GRITH," "THE SENIOR PARTNER," "MITER COURT," ETC.

ACCORDING to the time-table our nearest station is but nineteen and a half miles from London.

The compilers of that intricate publication, which professes to give accurate information, not merely about our local line, but also our main, our adjuncts, the Metropolitan, the daylight route, the North London and some wild "Will-o'-the-Wisp," which leads travellers around Merton Abbey, are surely greatly mistaken.

They must mean, if not 1,950 at least 195.

Yes, that is it. We are a hundred and ninety-five miles from London down in the remote county of Middlesex. We might be in the wilds of Cornwall, if Cornwall have still any wilds; we might be able to chase deer with Katerfelto in Devon, if Devon have still any deer and any of Katerfelto's progeny are still living; we might be still digging up the pots of silver and gold with which this neighbourhood was once and possibly is now so lavishly bestrewed; we might, even at this present time of writing, have all the rare birds, all the lovely flowers, all the ferns, simples, moths and butterflies of which civilization has bereft us, for indeed civilization has done nothing for the district in which these lines are penned except cut down our trees and hedges.

No more gallant shows of white hawthorn, no more blackberries for the children, no more wild briony with its brilliant berries, no more hops or nightshade; nothing but the dead bare level dear to the hearts of farmers, who of all men except perhaps gardeners have the least fondness for anything picturesque.

For the rest, civilization has left us as dark, dirty and lonely as heart can desire.

Make no mistake, I do not desire to be in the least less dark, dirty and lonely; I would rather wade through mud, do without light, live the life of a hermit for ever, than see the jerry builder with his accompanying army of incompetent workmen take possession of those fields over which larks still sing, where grass still springs, where sheep-bells still tinkle, where weeds still defy the march of progress, where red poppies still flaunt among the corn, and cardamoms and buttercups still deck the meadows ready for the scythe.

The land is not yet "ripe," to use an auctioneer's phrase, to grow a crop of dreadful gardens, villas, terraces; but it would be instantly if we were lighted, paved, sewered, watered.

"A long day, my lord—a long day," I cry. Even with prostrate trees and shorn hedges may it last my time.

In summer or in winter, in sickness or in health, in joy or in sorrow, in wealth or in poverty, God's country is to my mind as infinitely preferable to man's town as I believe Heaven is to earth; once upon a time the country was not lonely, and it can scarcely be charged as a crime to the country that it is desolate because the inhabitants who once made it gay have migrated to town.

In my hamlet the resident families of any position may be counted on one hand and still leave some fingers to spare; we have no church, till lately we had no post office, it goes without saying we have no telegraph; but we had one shop and of course one public-house, called "The Goat;" and surely never before did that animal prove so attractive.

To it the youth and age gravitate as though drawn by a load-stone. There politics are discussed; there most extraordinary ideas are broached, thence marvellous notions evolved. In my ignorance I formerly imagined the sole attraction a tavern possessed was unlimited beer. Observation, however, has satisfied me that drink, though no doubt an important factor in the business, is not by any means the only one.

There the poor man, if possessed of or in the way of earning if only a penny, receives as cordial welcome as Mr. Shenstone himself probably ever found at an inn. The faces he sees are cheerful perforce, for how could a surly landlord ever expect to succeed? In the tap-room there is in the worst of weather and hardest of times a glorious fire; as a rule he meets the—in his estimation—best of good company, because they tell the stories which amuse him most and talk of persons and affairs which interest him keenly. Everything is bright, clean and orderly, there is no stiff conventionality, but on the other hand there is no riot and, best of all, there are no women.

It is his club—entrance fee a penny cash or credit. There he takes refuge from the unswept hearth, crying children and too often nagging wife. There he has full liberty to carry his mid-day meal and eat it in peace; there he can discuss and settle to his own mind the affairs of the nation. To him the tap-room seems a free and pleasant country, frequented by wits and controversialists, by local *flâneurs* and men conversant with burning social questions. The members of the Athenæum or Army and Navy or even the Garrick have not yet half so much for their money, and yet Sir Wilfrid Lawson and his followers would close these centres of intellectual activity and substitute taverns devoted to tea and coffee, beverages which in any rank do not lend themselves to brilliancy of conversation or originality of thought; Sir Wilfrid's

originality being only the exception which proves the rule. It is not given to every one to be witty on cold water.

Here in Middlesex, merely that trifle of one hundred and fifty miles from London, which we reach in about the time we could travel down to Rugby, at an expense which would suffice in the excursion season to take us to Hunstanton and back, we are very original and primitive. If St. Paul came back to earth, he would never persuade our village financiers, politicians and gossips that Her Most Gracious Majesty does not pocket all the Queen's taxes—which none of them pay, by-the-by—that an exhibition is not to be held this year in Hyde Park; that a tower is not about to be erected near London, from the top of which people will be able to see all over England, "because"—kindly notice this "because—the nobility have so much money they are bound to spend it some way;" that the *Times* has not still evidence to produce which will change the whole Parnell case; that there is not a great canal being cut at Bristol, with many more conceits of the same sort it might prove tedious to mention.

This is my hamlet; these, with the honourable exceptions which might be counted on those few fingers previously mentioned, are its inhabitants. My modest cottage stands hard by this primitive Eden. Before I took possession it had stood in its present position, open to all the winds of Heaven, which have not been evicted yet. It was the most neglected, tumble-down place I ever elected to take and I am fond of neglected, tumble-down places. When repaired, painted, papered, made generally habitable, they lose half their charm.

Where, for instance, is that wealth of forget-me-not which once made the old garden a reflex of the blue sky; where the violets that carpeted the moss-grown walks; where the periwinkles which made the heart glad even in mid-winter; where the wealth of daffodils which cast a glitter of gold over the earth; where all the wild things which bloom in their season with such lavish profusion? Alas—and alack a day—there are no bouquets to be culled at Christmas now as there were before the rake and hoe cleared a way through the tangle!

Having reduced the weeds and made the house weather-tight it seemed to me that I might rest awhile—but it did not seem so to my friends.

To them it occurred that I ought to let the cottage. Against this idea I turned a passive resistance for more than three years; but at length I was over persuaded. I am not prepared to say that it was not a good thing—I only knew I did not want to let the place, and hugged myself into the belief it never would let.

The rooms were low; the rooms were small; the furniture—well, it was not such as a gentleman with a large balance at his bankers' would order from a fashionable upholsterer. There was no

tennis lawn—there was nothing such as people want now-a-days. Nobody would want it——

Did they not, though. I could have let it over and over—but I closed with the first offer, and Providence being very good to me, secured most charming tenants, who speedily transformed themselves into kind friends.

Most people when they let their houses go away. It is a capital plan; but where would have been the profit had I followed their example?

Going away in my case would have meant saving at the spigot and spilling at the bung with a vengeance. No, I did nothing of the kind; I merely having let the “New Farm House,” aged about 150 years, retired into the old, the age of which no man knoweth. How many people lived in it in the old forgotten times I cannot conjecture; I only know that at present one person, myself, is greatly pressed for room.

The whole house contains but five small apartments, a scullery and a hall.

In this abode I bivouacked last summer—in this abode I am bivouacking still—for, not content with my first experiment, I must needs paint the lily and let the modest cottage again for the winter to a tenant who though not so much charmed with the house or the locality as my friends of last summer, wishes to remain till the autumn. When I retake possession I shall proceed to grapple with and exorcise the various winds which have been whistling up the staircase and along the passages since I vacated the premises.

When night falls—when the village children are fast asleep—nothing more utterly still than the old farmhouse can be conceived. If one began to think about it the silence might be felt.

As I write not a sound breaks the stillness save the gas in the coals. Even the Japanese geese are mute—a rare event—and the ducks are indulging in their first sleep.

Silence wraps me round; the only other dweller in the house has long since bade me good-night and I am as quiet as if I were in that hut on the Yorkshire moors for which I am always longing.

The other night the house was just as quiet when a pull at the bell broke the stillness.

The outer door was fastened as it usually is at dark; but I undid it and holding a lamp aloft beheld a coachman in the neighbourhood who has always accorded to me a dignified affability for which I feel grateful.

This individual, who I think has somehow missed his vocation, for if appearances go for anything he ought to be an archbishop—carried a large volume and a paper—and before I could get my breath said:

“I beg your pardon for troubling you, ma’am; but Mrs. Henry Boston is coming to England and——”

"It is rather early for her," I remarked as he paused.

"She's coming, ma'am, as you'll see; she has sold her paper, *The Graphic*, and is going to buy up *Current Interest* here."

I was dazed—he came upon me in the middle of a paragraph. I was like one wakened from sleep and for one wild minute it crossed my mind that in a spirit of the purest philanthropy he had walked round to give me the earliest intelligence of what he thought might prove a great chance for an impecunious author.

Happily I did not commit myself for I never was more mistaken during the whole course of a life in which I have been many times mistaken.

"Pray come in," I said, for he was still standing on the step, where had it been summer roses would have drooped over him.

He did so and went on, "I thought you could give me advice, ma'am. I have six volumes of *Current Interest*, and if they would be of any use to her——"

I felt I was rapidly going crazy. What did the man mean? What on earth did he want? The lamp I held was of the dimmest description and threw but the smallest light on the subject.

"You had better come in here," I said leading the way into a small room which my visitor's portly person seemed to fill.

"I knew you would give me advice on the matter, ma'am," he said with excited eagerness. "There is the paragraph," and he pointed to a few lines in *The Night Express*, a much crumpled copy of which he had put in my hand while we stood in the outer gloom.

I asked him to be seated, and going over to the light read, "that Mrs. Henry Boston having sold her illustrated paper for 400,000 dollars, £80,000, was coming to England to purchase such organs of current interest as she might select."

There was a lordly ease about this which surprised me a good deal, but it possessed the merit of enlightening me as to what was passing in my visitor's mind and the knowledge astonished me much more than the paragraph.

"You see that, ma'am."

"Oh, yes, I see," I replied.

"Eighty thousand pounds—four hundred thousand dollars is eighty thousand pounds?"

"I suppose so," for indeed eighty thousand pounds seemed to me near enough.

He looked up at me anxiously waiting for the advice which was to secure him some share of all that wealth (I wonder what amount he expected to receive) and I stood looking down on him considering how I could best say he had found a mare's nest.

I gazed at his fine head, large enough to have contained sufficient theology for a bench of bishops; his curly grey hair so carefully arranged; his wonderful moustache, which starting from each side of his mouth wandered in a graceful curve downward to

his white cravat, and I really felt very sorry that mine should be the hand to dash such a cup of promise from his lips.

"If I understand you rightly," I began, "you have six volumes of *Current Interest*, which you thought Mrs. Boston might possibly buy?"

"Yes, ma'am; you see they're no good to me and she might as well have them."

"But even if Mrs. Boston were going to buy *Current Interest*, and the *Night Express* does not say she is——"

"You have not noticed, ma'am. If you would read the passage again," he interrupted.

"I have read it," I said, and the absurdity of the whole affair would have been too much for my gravity, but for the sort of vexed feeling one has when forced to disappoint a child. "I don't in the least know what is meant by organs of current interest; but I do know that *Current Interest* is not one of the papers meant. Even eighty thousand pounds would not buy any leading London journal," and then I thought that perhaps the *Night Express* might consider the present time favourable for Transatlantic energy to purchase *The Times*.

"Do you think not, ma'am?" he asked, questioning not my last statement, but my first. "Perhaps you are not acquainted with *Current Interest*?"

"I know it very well," I answered, glancing at the big volume he was affectionately nursing.

"There is a little of everything in it," he went on, "a little of all sorts. I daresay your name, ma'am, is in it somewhere."

"I daresay."

"And if Mrs. Boston would like the six volumes."

"You mistake," I interposed. "Even if Mrs. Boston were to buy *Current Interest*, she would not purchase secondhand volumes; she would buy what we call the copyright. Suppose, for instance, she took over the *Illustrated London News*; she would buy the right to produce and publish it; to carry it on in fact (how hard it is to explain literary matters to outsiders), but she would not buy old odd volumes from persons who might chance to have them."

"Would she not, ma'am?" and his tone told me that although he was still incredulous his castle in the air was vanishing away.

"No," I told him very decidedly, and then as I could not bear to see his disappointment I was weak enough to add: "If you have any old books you want to get rid of, you might let me see them; perhaps I could buy some."

His face instantly lighted up; this time I am sure with the hope of making his fortune.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "I was in ten minds to bring round a Latin grammar by a namesake of yours—the Reverend Mr. Riddle."

Now a Latin grammar is no doubt a most useful and excellent

work, but as it cannot be regarded as of much assistance in novel writing, or even pleasant viewed as light reading, I hastened to produce a volume on Old London I picked up in Lambeth Walk for threepence, in order to show the sort of thing likely to find favour.

"Ah!" he remarked, "I know London well."

Touched on my tenderest point, I incautiously answered: "And so do I."

"Do you, ma'am?" he said; and no words can convey an idea of the pitying tolerance he managed to throw into that question.

His incredulity, I am bound to say, was not without reason, for my knowledge of his London, new fashionable, suburban London, is indeed by no means exhaustive.

After that he descended to particulars. He had lived twenty years with a foreign gentleman resident near Hyde Park, and was good enough to explain how his name ought to be pronounced.

Then he, my visitor, not the gentleman with the foreign name, took a lodging-house—two, indeed, I fancy—and came signally to grief.

Whether lodgers failed to take rooms, or whether they failed to pay, I did not gather; only one thing is certain—a sheriff's officer appeared on the scene; in the language of the poet,

"A whirlwind from the desert came,
And all was in the dust."

"Even to my daughter's piano," he finished.

No wonder, poor fellow, he wanted to sell his six volumes of *Current Interest* to Mrs. Boston. That entertaining publication had no doubt come into his possession after the minions of the law departed.

About this time it being borne in upon him that I knew what I was talking about, and that his chance of going shares in Mrs. Boston's £80,000 might be regarded as infinitesimally small, it struck me he waxed somewhat bitter on the subject, for he remarked:

"Ah! they make a lot of money out there and then they come over here and marry poor dooks."

It occurred to me that our "poor dooks" generally go out there when they want to marry a lot of money; but perhaps he knows more about such matters than I. Happily we were drifting further and further away from those six volumes of *Current Interest*, and he felt able to tell me he could have taken service with a certain "dook," but his wife would not let him.

I did not see why he should not have closed with the offer, and said as much, but was crushed by the reply, "People think so badly of him."

He referred also to a duchess who likewise hungered to possess him as coachman, but as his wife again intervened, objecting apparently even more to the lady than she had done to the gentleman,

he drifted down into these wilds—which is a great pity, for his appearance would grace any sphere, and his sweetness is quite wasted on the air of our desert hamlet.

By this time he had risen and stood at his full stature. He is of a just and convenient height. He did not go immediately; instead, he took a slow and comprehensive glance round the room.

I watched him curiously as his eyes wandered from the scattered sides of "copy" on the table to the tattered volumes in the book-case, and wondered what in the world he was thinking about.

I soon knew. There is no incertitude in great minds. There was none about him.

"And you sit here, ma'am," he remarked at last.

It is always well to extract a compliment from the most unlikely utterance if you can; but in this case it was not possible. Conceit itself could not have transformed the sentence into—"This is the shrine where genius dwells. Here those books are indited which thrill hearts wherever the English language is spoken!"

Of course I should have liked to take all this out of his simple words, but his tone had so utterly crushed me that I could only answer:

"Yes; I sit here."

"All alone?"

I could have informed him that, on the whole, it is not easy to write novels, say in a crowd; that it is the nature of an author to seek solitude, but the appalling silence struck me so forcibly I merely repeated his words:

"All alone."

"And you are not afraid, ma'am."

"I am not afraid," I answered.

I wonder how many hundred times I have been asked that question. It puzzled me once, but it puzzles me no longer.

Most people are afraid of being alone with themselves; they dread having those questions thrust upon them which underlie our daily life; they fear with an exceeding fear, greater even than their horror of burglars, facing the truth that some day they must go to their long home, and that the windows shall be darkened and the doors shut, and life ended for them and not for another.

"I could not do it," said my visitor, evidently convinced that what he could not do it must be wrong for any one else to attempt, after which confession he went out into the darkness, carrying his volume with him, and leaving me to recover my senses as best I could.

P. S.—If this paper should meet the eye of Mrs. Henry Boston, or any other lady or gentleman desirous of adding six volumes of *Current Interest* to her or his library—there is even the chance of my name being somewhere in the letter-press—I shall be most happy to negotiate the purchase.

A QUICK THING.

By A. N. HOMER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN HE LOVED," "RED RUIN," ETC.

THERE was no denying it, Charles Piers Mostyn, of H.M. regiment of light horse, was ill at ease. At one moment he would burst into wildest merriment in response to some very poor jest uttered by his fellow *voyageurs*, and the next his blue eyes wore a far-away expression, and he would give vent to an audible sigh. How was this? since his surroundings were calculated to put fresh life into any man, no matter how old and careworn, and yet Charlie Mostyn looked glum despite the fact that the sun shone brightly upon his twenty-one summers. The scene was the fair river Thames, and he was sprawling full length in the stern-sheets of the boat which his two brothers were endeavouring to scull up stream against a strong current.

"Look ahead, Charlie, or you'll have us smashing into that canoe," sang out Bertie, who was stroking and had seen the danger only just in time to escape a collision.

"All right, old boy; you go on. I'll mind the yoke lines, never you fear," but the words had barely left his lips before the boat's head narrowly shaved the overhanging bank as they rounded a sharp angle in the stream. To Bertie's intense disgust it was only an adroit use of the boat-hook which saved them from a foul.

"Hang it, Charlie, you come and row; a paddle before dinner will do you good. Eh! what do you say?" he ventured to ask.

"Not much, thanks; very comfortable where I am," was all the answer Charlie saw fit to give.

"Well, you are a jolly muff. Why, man, it's as good as a play to watch your face only for five minutes, you might have eaten something for lunch that didn't agree with you. I wish I were in your place, that's all I can say."

For a few seconds Charlie turned his blue eyes towards the speaker and contemplated him steadily, whilst the tobacco in his briar-root pipe became red as a glowing cinder, but he said nothing and once more fell to thinking. There was, in reality, one very good reason why he should be serious, for it was his last night under the old roof which had sheltered him during the whole of his short life; and in the quiet stillness of the autumn twilight he could not help wondering whether he should ever return to the peaceful home of his childhood, or whether, like many another, he

would go forth into the world to die, where no woman's hand could soothe his anguish and tend him in his last moments. Each stroke of the oars brought to view some well-known object which recalled so vividly the past that he fell to wondering how it was he had never noticed the points of interest which chained him to the vanished years, until he was in danger of losing them perhaps for ever. There was the opening to the backwater, half-hidden by overhanging willows, in whose depths he had angled for certain monster fish, and he well remembered the very last time, when he had hooked and played and finally lost one of fabulous strength and weight. There, too, was the old boat-house, damp and overgrown with weeds, and near at hand a certain pool where he had learnt to take a header in real good style, and no thanks to any one. Beyond, and standing a few yards back from the bank, was the old ale-house, which did duty as a first-class hotel, and upon whose creaking sign-board, in gaudiest colouring, was displayed something startling and awe-inspiring in the shape of a ferocious-looking leopard in the act of springing upon an equally fierce-looking man arrayed in hunting-shirt and moccasins of wondrous design. Many were the times he had sat within those hospitable red-brick walls and enjoyed in security the soothing weed and mild ale which stringent orders at home forbade him. A hundred yards further on was the trimly-kept lawn which surrounded his home. Down to the river's edge stretched the smooth greensward, emerald in hue, save where the bright tints of the autumn flowers broke it up into patches. Ah! it was a home he might well feel dubious of quitting. Arrayed against such thoughts were a whole host of romantic visions which his boyish heart had conceived and dwelt upon. Without them he would not have been worth his salt as a soldier, or anything else. Even as the boat touched the landing place, and he led the way in silence towards the house, a proud smile curled his lip and a feeling of exultation stole into his heart. He was to join the colours at Portsmouth on the morrow. His regiment was under orders for the East, and what might that not portend? Fancy pictured to him at that moment none of the grim horrors of war. There were no groans and shrieks of the dying—no whiz of the hurtling shot—no rattle of the withering musketry—no roar of the furious cannonade. The pallid countenances of the dead were changed into strong and hearty soldiers, willing and ready to follow him to death or victory. The glittering decoration had been won and fastened on his breast; ah! dare he hope it—the glorious V.C. itself. And what soldier in the English army would not brave all for that? But a last dinner is always gloomy or made hideously unreal by forced gaiety, and somehow those about Charlie seemed ill-disposed to make the time pass by a display of merriment they were far from feeling. Facing him sat his kind old mother—the only parent left to him, for his father had been

cut to pieces fighting at the head of his regiment whilst still one of the youngest colonels in the service. Charlie Mostyn came of a good plucked race, but he was none the less a man because a big lump would rise in his throat as he gazed into her eyes and saw that they were dim with tears. He knew how she loved him, and those calm sad features, framed by the white widow's cap, would haunt him often in the future. He suddenly felt an overwhelming desire to smoke, and pushing back his chair he passed out on to the lawn unchallenged by a soul, for even the youngest, Gerald, a veritable imp of mischief and thoughtlessness, knew and respected his reason for leaving them so abruptly. Charlie strolled down to the water's edge, and standing in the shadow of a willow, with his back against its trunk, puffed steadily at his knowing little briar, and felt—well, just a shade out of sorts. What prettier scene can be pictured than a dear old-fashioned English house, covered with vines and flowering creepers inclosed in its own luxurious grounds where every flower-bed is a variegated study of rich colouring; the beauty of the whole enhanced by the deep-hued cedar tree and rustling ilex, whilst its boundary is the peaceful river rippling on-wards towards the sea. The home where he had first seen the golden sunlight had never seemed so beautiful to him as now, Charlie thought as he dashed what was very like a tear from his eyes, and gazed upward into the blue vault of infinite space where the twinkling myriads of stars glittered and the harvest-moon rode in her pale glory. He had just lost himself in trying to imagine each globe of light above his head a peopled world, when his attention was again diverted by a sudden blast of wind and the gleaming white of a boat's sail. Another instant and a sharper gust had swept over him, and at the same moment a piteous shriek for help assailed his ears. The next his coat was off and he was in the water fighting with the tangled stems of water-lilies that twined about his legs and threatened to drag him down. The weeds grew thick just there, but each second delayed might jeopardize a life, and he came of a race who had never lost a victory from indecision. "Bring the boat, you fellows. Help!" he called out once, but the night wind blew the sounds of his voice away, and unheard he gained the centre of the eddying stream. Before him, dead ahead, but borne down like himself by the strength of the current was something white floating on the shimmering water. A few strokes more and he could see it was a woman's dress. One powerful effort and he was close at hand.

"Courage; God help you!" he exclaimed as the white object disappeared, but rose again to clutch him with a frantic grip. The face and form was that of a girl, younger even than himself; but in the few brief seconds which passed before he threw his strong arms about her, memory stamped those pale moonlit features indelibly upon his brain. To swim fully clad and, moreover, with boots on is heavy work, but add to that the weight of

another and the difficulties are increased a hundredfold. Charlie turned and swam back again; for the shore he had left was the nearest to hand. And then came a terrible struggle in his mind when moments seemed years of agony. Should he let go that helpless form and save himself, and the whispered answer "never" trembled on his drawn lips. A few more weakening circles with the one arm that was free, and then came a sense of safety as though his work was accomplished, and Charlie Mostyn was unconscious. How long he remained so he never knew. When he next opened his eyes the familiar pattern of the wall paper which decorated his own cosy chamber danced before them, and a dreamy sense of comfort stole over him. Subdued rays of shaded lamp-light filled the room, and the blinds were closely drawn. The hands of the time-piece pointed to midnight, and Mrs. Mostyn sat there smiling and thanking God in her heart for the safety of her son.

"Is she safe?" he whispered.

"Yes, safe and well, Charlie. You are the one who suffered most; but you must be quiet and go to sleep, those are the doctor's orders, my darling."

For a few moments there was silence between them whilst Mrs. Mostyn flitted about the room intent on arranging everything for his greater comfort. At length Charlie was roused from his lethargy by feeling the cold nose of his pet fox-terrier "Snider" thrust lovingly into his hand, and the action was quickly followed by a low whine, meant to attract his attention.

"Good dog, down," he murmured as the animal fawned upon him. "Mother," he added as he suddenly raised himself bolt-upright in bed.

"Yes, dear, what is it? I thought you had fallen asleep again. Now come, like the good son that you have always been to me, try and compose yourself and to-morrow—" but the bare thought of what that morrow would bring was too much for her, and sobs choked her utterance. "To-morrow," at length she continued, "I will tell you all that has happened. But you stand in need of a good night's rest, and the doctor——"

"Oh! hang the doctor——"

"But, my boy——"

"Listen, mother. Where is she? The girl I saved, you know," he added explanatorily, as the blood surged into his brown cheeks and his eyes sparkled with excitement, "and who is she? Come now, you must tell me all you know to-night, or old Hodges' stuff will be worse than useless."

"You were always a little self-willed, Charlie, but I am very anxious that you should rest. Do try and curb your curiosity to-night. I will turn the lamp low and leave you to sleep."

"Take me at my word, mother, if you love me."

That last appeal is always a straight road to a mother's heart,

and Mrs. Mostyn was not proof against it, so she sat down by his side again and clasped his hand in her own.

"Well, my boy, you were carried up here drenched and unconscious, and I was in such misery about you that I never left your side. The lady, whoever she may be, was well cared for; Whilkes was with her. And she drove away——"

"Did what, mother?"

"She left here more than an hour ago. Why, Charlie, you startle me with your vehemence."

"Gone, and no one asked anything about her, mother! Why, I shall never forget her face as long as I live. But there, what a fool I am. I am weak and out of sorts to-night. Kiss me, and leave me to myself."

Mrs. Mostyn did as she was bidden, noiselessly closing the door behind her, and Charlie Mostyn was alone.

"No trace. No clue, and I am leaving England to-morrow. My luck, my luck," he murmured.

Ten minutes later there was a gentle tap at his door. "Mr. Charlie, if you please, sir."

"Yes. Come in."

"I was to give you *this* from the lady as you saved, sir."

Charlie's hand clutched a small parcel eagerly. "Thanks. Any message, Whilkes?"

"No, sir. I said as you was goin' abroad, and the lady she was hurried like——"

Somehow every pulse in Charlie's body was set wildly beating at that moment, and he longed to be alone, but he controlled himself.

"All right; good night, Whilkes. Yet stay, have you mentioned this to any one?"

"Not to a soul living, except yourself, sir."

"Very good. You will find a sovereign on my dressing table. You understand me, say nothing."

Whilkes gave a discreet nod, did as she was told and vanished. Before the door had well closed the flame in the lamp was smoking and threatening to break the chimney, and Charles Piers Mostyn was staring fixedly at a miniature set in a gold locket ornamented by a coronet in rose brilliants. That night and the next day passed, but the sun that gilded with its setting rays the dog vane and the quaint hands of the clock in the church tower of the Thames village, coloured the bistre-tinted sides of the great troopship that headed down Channel with Charlie Mostyn and his regiment on board.

* * * *

Weeks and many months had fled. There had been a huge mass meeting in Hyde Park. Opinions had been aired and thrashed out lustily by lungs and tongues that seemed to tire not, but at length the mob showed signs of dispersing, and as it broke

up, a tall straight figure strode leisurely away in the direction of the Stanhope Gate. It was Charles Mostyn in flesh and blood, only looking browner and bigger than of yore, but with the laughing smile that used to curl the corners of his good-natured mouth changed for a more serious expression. And the eyes, ah, there was no mistake about them; they had known disappointment and trouble.

"Half-past three. The deuce! Why did I waste my time listening to these people? I shall miss the chief. Here, cabby, are you engaged?"

"No, sir."

"Then drive to the War Office, sharp."

The old house up the river was still in the possession of the family; but it had been given over to another *régime*. The white widow's cap and the kind, calm face of Mrs. Mostyn was no longer to be seen presiding over the morning meal, or flitting happily amongst the summer flowers. Death, the great leveller of all distinctions, had claimed her, and she had gone to her long rest by her husband's side in the shadow of the church tower, whose bells had rung out her marriage chimes, and Charlie was lord and master now. His face wore a grave, almost stern expression, as the hansom bore him along. He had been mentioned favourably in dispatches, for one or two plucky things he had done; and he was daily expecting to be ordered away on an important mission. He had brought nothing back with him from the East, where he had sweltered under a fiery sun and exposed his person recklessly to danger, but *honour* and the—well, the *gaze d'amour* (as he loved to think it), and the two were enough for him. Time and tide wait for no man, and least of all officialism, so Charlie was in a state of bewilderment. He had cudgelled his brain in vain for a loophole of escape from his present position; for seriously he felt he was capable of doing anything rather than leave London just at that moment. It was true, he had been in town some weeks, but never once had he set eyes upon the giver of that precious *souvenir* of the cold water bath, which had so nearly ended tragically for him. Therefore the time had been lost, he told himself, for he had come home free, having been proof against all feminine wiles, and as he believed desperately in love with a myth born of a dangerous admixture of unsatisfied curiosity and romance. But now there was a chance of meeting her if he could only remain in town, for people were flocking up for the season. So ran Charlie Mostyn's thoughts on that bright spring afternoon, and to think with him was to act. He had just determined in his own mind that *somehow* he *would* remain in town, when his attention was attracted by—the thing that with one exception he loved best—a horse.

"By Jove! there goes a beauty," he muttered, as he bent his head to peer out of the window. Slowly the bright chestnut

which had aroused his admiration forged ahead, until for a moment the victoria, between the gaily-painted shafts of which it proudly stepped, was abreast of him. A young and well-dressed lady was the sole occupant. What caused him to start so violently and to exclaim in audible tones:

"It *is* her! It *is* her! Pull up, cabby; or at least—no, follow that victoria and——"

His voice was drowned by oaths, threats and expostulations. He had arrested his driver's attention to some purpose, for while he was peering into the hansom, trying to understand what instructions were being issued for his guidance, he had contrived to foul a growler on its way to Paddington; to run into a veritable pandemonium of fat old women, children, baths and band-boxes. There is a piteous sight that few men are hard-hearted enough to look upon with composure—a woman in distress. A nervous old lady was screaming at the pitch of her voice, to the accompaniment of swearing, threats and the plunging of the cab horse. Charlie was down in a moment though anathematizing his bad luck, with the result that in five minutes the four-wheeler was once more under weigh, and the faces of the occupants were wreathed with smiles.

"What a nice gentleman."

"And how handsome."

Were the sounds that smote upon Charlie's ear as the door closed and they rumbled away on their dusty journey. But no remarks *could* have been oily enough to soothe the troubled waters of Charlie's spirit, as he gazed down the empty street, and became alive to the fact that the victoria with its fair freight had disappeared. In vain he drove round one corner into a square, right across it and then anywhere that his knowledge of the locality and perseverance could suggest. All trace of the smart turn-out was lost. And so, late for his appointment and considerably disturbed in his mind, he was forced to wend his way to the War Office. When he issued forth again, the weighty conversation, the careful questioning and the string of instructions to which he had been subjected were a kind of dream. For the life of him he could not have repeated any portion of the discussion which had taken place. It was true that, unknown to him, the wiseheads had wondered and commented upon his absent manner and his brief unstudied replies. They were unaccustomed to such scanty traces of homage. And yet he was a man of mark, a dashing officer, whose brains and sabre were to be relied upon, and so he had been permitted to leave the gloomy precincts of officialism armed with a bundle of important dispatches and an order to proceed at once to Paris. Now this was the very step he was not prepared to take. After a well-cooked dinner at his club, his digestion aided by a bottle of good claret, he solemnly decided that—come what might—even though it cost him his commission,

he would not leave London that night. A well-cut profile, a softly-moulded chin, a stately head with a wealth of gold-brown hair, caught up under a knowing little hat, and where is the ambition of the opposite sex, and what mad act will they not commit to look again upon such a picture? They have a lot to answer for, those beauteous smooth-skinned Hebes, who destroy with a glance and spread death and destruction with a laugh and a wave of their dimpled hands. All the same Charlie had no strong argument to plead in favour of his sudden heedless decision, for the lady of the victoria had not even looked at him. But the glint of the gold-brown hair had been enough. He had a card for an "At Home" at the house of a great lady, a *lionne* of society, and thither he went. The gardens were ablaze with light, and a thousand coloured lanterns shot their many hued tints on the moving forms of the richly-clad guests. The air was heavy with subtle odours, and the soft night wind scarce stirred the huge fronds of the palms, whose tall stems towered side by side with the marble pillars of the portico. It was getting late as he touched his hostess's hand and then moved slowly on midst the crowd of gaily decked fashion, the sea of bright and changing faces—looking for one. With a wistful expression on his kind fearless face, he made his way through that moving mass, acknowledging the greetings of those he knew by a bow, a careless nod, or a cheery word. His patience was tried, but his perseverance conquered at last.

"De Vere, who is that lady?"

"Why, man, are you dreaming?"

"Not in the least; never more wide awake."

"And you mean to tell me that you do not know Lady Ethel? Why, Lord Moresby is worth a fabulous sum. She's the greatest catch in town."

"You forget I have only recently returned from abroad."

"Oh, ah, I forgot. Well, anyhow there's not a ghost of a chance for you, old boy. Better keep away. Take my advice and don't singe your wings. You'll only leave your heart behind you. My lady is impervious to pretty speeches."

"Don't be an idiot, De Vere," growled Charlie, for he was in no mood for chaff. "Introduce me."

"Oh certainly, but forewarned is forearmed."

He heard no words of introduction, but the next moment he found himself alone with the woman of his dreams, for the man she had been talking with walked away biting his lips with annoyance at the interruption of his *tête-à-tête*.

"So glad to meet you again, Lady Ethel," blurted out Charlie after a—to him—painful silence of some few seconds. Nothing like riding straight was his inward soliloquy as he spoke, and no sooner had the words left his lips than he turned and their eyes met.

"Again——" she faltered.

"Yes. This room is suffocating and there are no end of people looking at us. Lady Ethel, will you take my arm?"

For answer the little gloved hand was slipped within his keeping and they passed into the cool moist air of the conservatory, where the arching fronds of the tree ferns waved above their heads. They were alone for supper had defeated flirtation. She was the first to speak:

"I—I did not catch your name. You are——"

"Piers Mostyn," and for the rest he slipped the locket with its gilded coronet into her hand.

"Thank God we have met at last," she said impetuously, and the rich blood mounted to her cheeks. "I wanted so much to thank you and they told me you were going abroad and—but I wrote to your mother."

A cloud crossed his face and the thought flashed through his mind, *why* had he never even heard of that letter?

"I never knew it," he answered briefly.

"Still, *now* we have met. But for you I should be—ah, I shudder to think of it. I owe you my life; how can I ever repay you?"

"Do what you have done already: thank God," he answered gravely and then he plunged on recklessly. What possessed him? But he was a Piers Mostyn to the backbone, and his race had ever rushed their fences.

"Lady Ethel, you will deem me mad, but if you think you owe me anything, listen. To-day as you were driving I saw you for the first time since *that night*. I have cherished the memory of those few brief moments, when I held you in my arms, *from then till now*. I have no right to speak to you thus, but to-night I have staked my all upon the bare chance of meeting you. I ought to have left hours ago for Paris. I am here. Rank and promotion, perhaps *honour*, I have flung to the winds for your sake. I—I—Ethel, I love you. Ah, I have offended you, madman that I am. Tell me, for God's sake, are you angry?"

The birds disturbed by the unwonted noise twittered to each other in their gilded aviary, and the soft murmur of the water as it babbled and fell in cascades in its marble prison were the only sounds that broke the silence, as he stood before her, trembling at his own audacity; and waited for her answer.

"Are you angry?" he repeated. "Tell me quickly, I cannot leave you thus. Can you love me; may I even hope?"

The gold-brown head was never raised, but the lips tremulously framed the words and her answer came to him:

"*I owe you everything.*"

One hasty kiss, a pressure of the soft warm hand and his was the fulness of content. It was a *quick thing*, but it brought a life-long happiness in its train.

GOLDEN SANDS.

By J. SALE LLOYD,

AUTHOR OF "SHADOWS OF THE PAST," "THE HAZELHURST MYSTERY,"
"WE COSTELIONS," ETC., ETC.

"VIOLET, where did you get that ring?" A start, a vivid flush, a look of decided vexation and a sharp reply—that is how our first quarrel began; before that, great Scott! how happy we had been.

"Jack, how absurd you are, and why do you startle me like that? As to the ring, it is mine; is not that enough for you?"

"No, it is not enough; and I choose to be answered."

"A lord of creation!" laughed my wife somewhat bitterly. "You think then you have only to command, and I shall obey."

A pair of too bright eyes were turned upon me; they glittered with a light I had never seen in them before.

"Of course you will obey, Violet."

"Of course I shall *not*, Jack."

We stood looking at each other—we two who loved so well—with anger welling in both our hearts.

"That is a gentleman's ring," I continued.

"I did not say it was not."

"Whose is it? Where did it come from?"

"I will not tell you if you question me for a month," cried my wife impatiently; "so let us drop the subject."

Can any one explain what jealousy is? How that wild pang, that frenzied brain-fire first finds life? All I know is that it then took possession of *me*. I, who loved her so well, distrusted my wife, and she knew it.

"No, we cannot drop the subject as you suggest," I returned doggedly.

"Why?"

"Because—because if you had nothing to conceal you would speak openly, and tell me what I wish to know."

"What do you mean by conceal? You *cannot* think——"

She broke off suddenly. There was a startled quiver of the delicate nostril, a tremble of the red lip. She came very close to me, and laid her hand upon my arm.

"If I thought you *could* doubt me, Jack," she said, "I should know how to act; but you might be sure by now that I have too much spirit to be *ordered* by any man. I cannot tell you anything about the ring at present."

Our happiness hung then in the balance. I overturned it. I worshipped this woman. I longed to strain her to my heart and press my lips to hers; but some demon held me back.

"As I turned the corner just now I thought I saw Arthur Vane come out of our gate. Was I right?"

"Probably. My cousin only left a few minutes since."

"I see. He is a diamond merchant."

I went very close to her, and laid my hand roughly upon her white wrist—yes, roughly! I could see the print of my fingers upon the tender flesh. I saw it then of course, but I thought little of it at the time; but since—well, it does not bear thinking of.

"*Did your cousin bring you that ring?*" and my eyes were fixed upon hers as though they would read her very soul.

Before she and I were married people had said that Arthur Vane loved her with a more than cousinly love. Now it all came back to me as though the sun were let in upon my sometime darkened mind.

The stately little head was thrown back, the bright dark eyes met mine fearlessly; but a flood of crimson glow rushed over the sweet proud face, and receding, left her pale.

"What if he did?" she asked coldly—so coldly that I knew she was keeping down some strong excitement.

"If he did *we must part*. I will not allow you to receive presents from a former lover."

"Who told you that Arthur was my lover?"

"It was well known. And now, Violet, will you answer me?"

She stood regarding me with an *awed* expression in the startled eyes. For a time she neither moved nor spoke. Then she replied as though the words were wrung from her with difficulty.

"In the weary days which may come and go, remember that you sent me from you, and that you doubted my honour. Good-bye."

She turned like a sleep-walker, and went over the smooth lawn towards the house. I watched her with a sense of despair about my heart. If only my darling would confess her folly; if only she would tell me the truth, and ask me to forgive her, I felt that my jealousy would be crumpled up, and that she would be my own again. Even if Arthur Vane *had* cared for her, and had given her his ring, she must have loved my own worthless self best, or she never would have married me. I looked around my pretty garden, which Violet and I had laid out together only twelve months before, the smooth tennis-lawn, the many formed beds bejewelled with blossoms, the clusters of evergreens, the rose-hung gabled cottage—all looked so home-like, and had brought us two so much happiness. I shook myself together, and went indoors to try and make it up with my wife; *but she was gone*, no one knew whither.

Those were weary hours of waiting. Every moment I hoped

she would return ; but the shades of evening closed in, and morning dawned upon my desolation.

Violet had no relations except Arthur Vane, so where *could* she have gone ?

As quick as thought I dressed, and leaving my house, I went to that of my wife's cousin. He was not up, but I forced my way into his room notwithstanding the expostulations of his servants.

He sat up in bed and regarded me with genuine astonishment, then his eyes wandered to the clock upon his mantelpiece.

"My dear Bradley," he exclaimed in surprise, "you are an early visitor. I haven't finished my beauty sleep yet."

"Where is Violet?" I asked abruptly, staring at him.

It was his turn to stare after that. "My good fellow, you must have a *tile loose* to come to me with such a question," and he touched his own head as he spoke.

I sat down in a chair and buried my face in my hands ; after a while I looked up, and found him regarding me in utter astonishment.

"Why did Violet not marry you, Vane?" I inquired desperately.

He broke into a heart-whole laugh. "Were I a conceited man I might reply because I never asked her."

"You never asked her, yet every one said you loved her."

"So I did—dear little cousin Vi—she is the best woman who ever lived—save one."

"And that one?"

"I hope to introduce to you as my wife some day, but I should never have gained Flora, but for Vi."

"She never told me."

"No, she wouldn't, nor should I if the shadows were not nearly past. I am to be married next month, this after years of waiting is good news ; no wonder I slept well ! Violet will be glad. She has helped me, and kept my secret for the past five years."

I absolutely groaned.

"That ring," I gasped, "the ring you took to my wife yesterday?"

"What ! has she told you about it after all?" he inquired in surprise ; "well, one thing is evident, she can keep my secrets better than her own. You have won a prize in winning my cousin Violet. She is as true as steel, and if only Flora loves me one half as well as *she* loves *you* I shall be the happiest man alive."

"I certainly am the most miserable," I broke out.

"*You!* why, I thought——"

"Ah ! so did I—but—Vane, *my wife has left me!*"

For full sixty seconds he gazed at me in astonishment ; then he got up and dressed himself, and went towards the door.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"To the doctor's; you're all wrong, my dear boy."

If it had not been unmanly I should have cried outright.

"The ring," I repeated, "for the love of Heaven tell me about it. Why did you give it to my wife? and why did she hide the fact from me?"

Arthur Vane returned and looked at me curiously, as though I were some strange specimen of the species.

"By Jove! like that, are you? Bradley, I think jealous people should be treated like mad dogs, no one can tell what harm they will do. I never fancied before that you would have doubted Violet's truth and my honour."

His hard words hit straight home.

I sat staring at the pattern of the carpet, but presently I plucked up spirit to make another protest.

"The ring!" I repeated doggedly, "there must have been some secret about that."

"You are right, there was. I promised to keep it; but now I believe it would be better kept in the breach than the observance. The secret is, that your loving wife heard you express the wish that you could afford a handsome diamond ring, and ever since has been saving from her pin-money to gratify your whim. I let her have the diamond at cost price, and got it properly set for her, poor girl, and yesterday I ran in with it as I passed. It was for your coming birthday. She was delighted with it, and at the thought of your pleasant surprise; and it is deuced hard that her love and kindness should get her into trouble. As for myself I will help in no more domestic secrets. Poor Violet! I wish to goodness I knew what had become of her. She was so absurdly fond of you, that she would take the affair to heart."

My shame, joy and sorrow were oddly mingled.

"Why, why she did not tell me?" I exclaimed eagerly. "I came home unexpectedly, and crossed the grass to meet her. She never saw me, she was so much engrossed gazing at a diamond ring. She then tried to hide it, and appeared very much vexed and confused. I insisted on hearing who had given it to her."

"And naturally she wouldn't tell you; girls won't be bullied."

"Oh! *why* did she not let me into her secret?" I groaned.

"Rather, *why* did you insult a true woman by your doubts? In your place I should not lose a moment. I should seek her *at once* and let her know *what I thought of myself*. She loves you and will therefore forgive."

I got up and grasped his hand.

He had taken a weight off my mind. Yet what a heavy one there was left. *Where* was I to find my darling; and when found would she pardon me, not only my doubt of her, but my rough usage?

Yes! I remembered now vividly how I had caught her by the wrist and left my mark upon the white flesh.

I did seek my wife—Heaven knows I sought her—but with no success.

I spent my whole leave going from place to place, first upon one false track, then another.

I was a civil servant, and not by any means a rich man, although my income was a comfortable one.

When I returned to my work the fellows exclaimed at the sight of me.

Grey hairs had crept into my erst dark locks; all my jollity had left me. I was melancholy and, well, I must own it—disagreeable.

There were reports innumerable as to why Violet had gone away; and I was silent on the subject—silent as the grave. Doubtless I was not a pleasant companion, and my best friends grew tired of me. I did not mind that. I haunted the private inquiry offices, and lived upon the excitement of false scents.

I couldn't rest in my home, every spot in it reminded me of my lost darling. Twelve months passed.

I applied for my leave again.

I had almost given up hope of finding Violet.

That year had gone heavily for me, but it had been brisk enough to others. Arthur Vane was a happy benedict, and his wife was one of the prettiest women I had ever seen.

Their happiness made me envious; my lack of it, and my conduct to Violet, caused them to give me the proverbial cold shoulder. So I did not see much of them; when I did, I used sometimes to wonder at an expression I more than once caught in Mrs. Vane's remarkably beautiful eyes. Afterwards I understood its meaning.

As I said before, the time had come for me to go on leave once more.

I took no pleasure whatever in the prospect. My health required the change, so I must go, but otherwise work was better for me, inasmuch as it gave me less time for thought.

I decided upon a well-known seaport in North Wales, and made up my mind to travel by a late evening train.

Something detained me, and I as nearly as possible lost it.

It had begun to glide out of the station, but the guard was a good-natured man, and hustled me into the very last carriage. It proved a most comfortable one and was empty.

I had it to myself the whole way, and slept through the live-long night.

Once I heard the door open, and a strange voice say "Golden Sands," but I wove it into my dream, and my sleep was disturbed no more until an abrupt jolt shook me so decidedly that I really awoke. There was a light in my carriage certainly, such as it was, but it was nearly out. I put my head from the window and saw another dim light, and for the second time I heard the words "Golden Sands" repeated in a very sleepy voice.

I called to its owner, and after a few minutes conversation, I learnt that I had got into a slip carriage, and had been left behind by the express train some miles away, from whence a good strong horse had tugged it along at a slow pace, and there was no mode of return for the next twelve hours! So there was nothing to do but to make the best of a bad bargain.

There fortunately was a little inn at which to finish the night, and breakfast, and I took advantage of it.

When I finally awoke the following morning the sun was somewhat high in the sky, and as I looked from my window I felt almost repaid for my mistake.

Mistake did I call it! It was the direct hand of fate, and no mistake at all.

The inn was situated some half-mile inland, upon high ground, and the sea view was a glorious one, with a broad reach of the ocean as far as eye could range. Before me lay a small fisher settlement, and the fishers were then sailing off into the distance, with their tawny red sails set to the breeze; not one was left behind.

A desire came upon me to follow them. I never had been out fishing, but I thought I should like it, the boats appeared to ride the waters so smoothly and with so much ease.

I dressed, had my breakfast, and strolled down to the beach. Upon my way I was interested in a small but picturesque cottage, the garden of which led to the shore and a rustic boathouse. From the distance a sweet voice floated, singing one of my darling's songs, and the voice rooted me to the spot.

A woman passed. I asked her who lived there, and she told me. I gleaned from her busy tongue that it was the seaside retreat of an elderly literary lady named Miss Nation, and my dream was broken. My only wonder was that Miss Nation had retained such a perfect voice at mature years.

I walked on to the cottages on the beach. One boat was lying high and dry. Its owner was one of those men plying upon the world of waters, but the owner's wife was there. The woman hesitated. She acknowledged that she did not know much about the boat, but she was sure it wanted something done to it, and "her man" was going to see to it when he had leisure, as they did sometimes have a few visitors who liked a pull, and it was the only one suitable for hire at Golden Sands, and they were glad to earn a few shillings by it, for their family was large and their means were small.

I did not find it very difficult to persuade her to let me take the little craft, and she willingly provided me with bait and tackle, and assisted me to push off, herself.

As the boat glided along under my not too skilful guidance, I looked back at Miss Nation's cottage, and became aware that some one was at the window watching me, but there were lace curtains

inside and flowers out, so I could see but little of the lady, who nevertheless appeared to me to be quite young, and moreover my wild fancy imagined the colour of the hair and the contour of the face to be like those of my wife.

I went bump up against a projecting piece of rock. *Such a bump!* but I took little or no notice of the circumstance, and on I pulled; but, impatient for sport, I did not go very far, but let down my anchor and put out my line.

Watching the water made me sleepy, and I was soon at the bottom of the boat and in the "land of nod."

I awoke with a species of nightmare. I thought I was being drowned, and started to find it almost true. The boat was full of water, and might go down at any moment. I sprang up and seized the oars. Life during the past year had never seemed much worth the having, but now that it had come to a question of parting with it I was far from willing to do so. I was a veritable cockney, and had never learnt to swim, and up to the time I had married Violet I preferred lampposts to trees, Regent Street to the prettiest view in the world, and my club to any other place. I pulled my hardest for dear life. Yes, I acknowledged, with all my sadness and sorrow, life was *still* dear! And I got back shorewards as far as the very rock on which I had bumped, and no doubt added to the injuries the boat had already sustained. There she dived like a bird of the ocean, and I was left in the water in company with the oars and fishing tackle. I clung to one of the oars which washed up against the rock.

That rock was very attractive. I thought so at that moment, and scrambled on to its rough point, regardless of the discomfort of my position, and I managed to fish the oar up towards me with my foot, and digging it into the sand and seaweed below, it helped to steady me in my perilous position.

The busy wives of the fishermen worked on in their cottages without a thought of me, and I could see no one, absolutely no one, from whom to hope for assistance. I began to wonder how long it would be possible to remain where I was. Nature, which objects to aches, pains and discomfort, said "only for a very little while." I looked towards the window where I had seen Miss Nation, but that hope left me; no one was there.

But wait! My heart leapt into my mouth. I saw a flutter of petticoats in the garden. If only I could make the literary lady hear or see! I struggled to get out my handkerchief from my coat tail pocket, and as nearly as possible lost my balance. Furiously I waved and as furiously I shouted.

Yes, I was heard or seen! A white handkerchief was waved in return.

That was perhaps the very happiest moment of my life. I make the confession with shame, but I must tell the truth. The horror of a watery grave was almost too much for me. Violet was well-

nigh forgotten. The most charming creature in all the world to me seemed middle-aged Miss Nation. I determined, no matter what I suffered, to hold on until that good woman sent me succour.

Sent! She was an angel; she was coming herself! The door of the boathouse was thrown open; the boat was quickly drawn through a little creek; in another moment Miss Nation was in it, and pulling towards me with able hands.

I was still in misery, but I was exultant. Had I been a single man I should then have made a vow to marry Miss Nation, regardless of her age and blue stockings. As it was there could be no harm in my admiring the back of her neck. The old lady had thick brown hair coiled about a shapely head, and even in my critical position I questioned how she had managed to retain it so long, when I had a thin place coming on the crown of mine at nine-and-twenty, and wondered whether she would be offended if I were to ask for the recipe for her hair wash! Miss Nation's skin too was creamy white. The sun shone upon her neck and showed up its dazzling fairness. Once or twice a face gave a rapid glance around. I thought I must be getting delirious! Miss Nation was *so very like my wife*, and how she was pulling, as though *her* life as well as mine depended upon her speed!

My pulses were throbbing wildly; a strong hope broke out in my heart like sunshine. My eyes never left the fair form. The boat shot alongside that jagged rock, which was but a sorry sort of resting-place, and those dear eyes which I knew so well were shining with tears and looking at me full of love.

"Oh, Jack! thank God I am in time," she said, and that was all. Not an unkind word, not a reproach. My heart was too full then for speech, but I clasped my arms about her and made a solemn vow—and what is more, I have kept it.

No young married woman in society has had more admirers than my wife, but the first cloud in our lives was our last, and I never had cause to regret my accidental visit to Golden Sands.

I understood after a long talk with Violet what Mrs. Arthur Vane's eyes had so often said to me. *She* knew where my wife was hiding, Miss Nation being in fact her own aunt, and there is but little doubt that she many times longed to let me into the secret.

TWO PARAGRAPHS IN THE PARIS PAPERS.

By E. C. SOMERVILLE.

Thursday, April 8, 188—.

I, Pierce Cormac, have no great story to tell, and I do not know what impulse it is that is driving me this dull rainy morning to set down the events of the last few weeks. But to a man to whom such a thing has happened as has happened to me, the future may have interest enough to warrant the telling of all that is anyway concerned with what may be before me. God knows I shall be glad enough if some day, in two or three years maybe, I can put this paper in the fire and say to myself, "It was nothing after all—a false alarm."

I am now writing in a small room high up in an hotel in the Rue des Saints Pères, Paris; but until a few weeks ago I lived a very quiet life in the heart of the County Clare. I was my father's second son, and at the time of my elder and only brother's death, I was being educated in Paris with a view to becoming a priest. I was fifteen years old when I first went to Paris, knowing nothing but what the national schoolmaster had toilsomely taught me, and, except in the matter of the French language, I had not added much to my small stock of learning when, two years later, poor Redmond died, and my father, who was a widower, sent for me to come home.

He took away my hand from the plough, saying the priesthood was a good trade for second sons, but was not fit business for his heir. He sent me to college, and I spent four years in Dublin, where I learnt to speak in a brogue—having almost forgotten my native inflection during my schooling in France—and acquired a smattering of the law, and generally fitted myself to take my seat on the bench of magistrates when I finally came home for good.

Soon afterwards my father died; and, there being no apparent reason why I should do otherwise, I went on living at Carrig Frass, with little to interest me beyond my horses and my shooting, and nothing to do but look after my small property, which at best brought me in about five or six hundred a year.

One day—it was my birthday, the 13th of last month, March—I rode over to Bludth. Bludth is a hamlet, about fourteen Irish miles off, and it is as forsaken a place as you could ever see. The only decent building in it is the police barracks—a tall, white-washed box of a place, with triangular iron blinds to the windows, like the vizors which you see on old helmets. There are a couple

of public-houses, and the rest of "the street," as they call it, is composed of wretched little thatched cottages, of which, for the most part, I have the honour of being the proprietor.

My business was to collect rent, and bad as the times are, I got the greater part of the few pounds which I was owed. At one house only, the last in the row, which had straggled a little apart from the others, was my rent refused to me.

The man who owned it was an ill-conditioned blackguard, who was more than suspected of being an agent in the many moon-lighting outrages that have disgraced this county. I had stopped at his house in coming, and left word with his wife that this was his last chance, and that I would "have the law of him" if he did not pay up. Now as I rode away, I stayed for a moment outside and called again for Daniel Herlihy. No answer came; the door was shut, and as I rode on I whistled to Shaun, my little yellow Irish terrier, to follow me without further delaying.

He had fallen some distance behind, nosing about at the side of the road, and as he passed Herlihy's cabin a large dog jumped over the wall of the potato-garden, and knocking him over, began to worry him. I jumped off and left the mare standing in the middle of the road while I did my best to separate the dogs. At last, by dint of laying into the aggressor—a big grey brindled cur that had often before attacked me—with my crop, I made him loose his hold of Shaun's throat, and with a kick that must have tested the stuff his ribs were made of, I sent him over the wall.

Shaun was but little the worse for the encounter; my own hand had got a good deal torn by either his or the grey dog's teeth, but it was nothing to signify, and I soon tied it up with my pocket-handkerchief. The mare was rooting with her nose in the mud on the top of the fence and let me catch her without trouble, and I started again.

It was past six o'clock, an angry-looking, stormy afternoon. I was riding up a valley through the hills to the west, in the teeth of the wind which was blowing big brown clouds over the high edge of the mountains through the gap in which the sun had gone down. A desolate little lake, half-smothered by rushes, fills up the lower end of the valley through which my road went. It was black with the small waves that the wind had whipped all over it, and the nearer hills hid it from the yellow light that was still flowing in a long stream over the shoulder of Forna. The narrow bohireen on which I was travelling was squeezed close in between the lake—Lough Clure, its name is—and the steep, up-springing sides of a furzy hill that rose nearly sheer out of the water. I remember the thought striking me that this was just the sort of time one might expect to meet the Black Hound that the country-people say lives in Lough Clure. They say he comes up now and then, dark and dripping out of the water, and on whoever he lays his paw there comes a black sickness like the plague, and no one

has ever recovered from it. But one cannot believe all their stories.

A little boy riding on a donkey met me; a grey ghost of a donkey, and a little boy who looked in the twilight as ghostly as his jackass. He bobbed his head to me as he passed, but I did not take any notice of him. I was jogging steadily on, with the rent, which had been paid me in very small coin, clinking in my pockets. My thoughts were back in Paris. This was a good-for-nothing, colourless life I was living—no profession, no hopes, no future. I wished there had never been any idea of making a priest of me. It was an unlucky thing, somehow, to have gone back of a resolve of that kind. I could not shake off a superstitious feeling that doing so had brought some blight over my life.

"My Gad! Look at the little dog!"

This from the donkey-boy whom I had just passed, blended with a yell from a dog. I looked round; the boy was off his donkey stooping over something in the road. I rode quickly back to where he was standing, and there saw Shaun struggling in the dust, half of his head laid open by a blow from a large stone that lay on the road by him.

"'Twas Dan Herlihy thrun it," the donkey-boy said excitedly. "I seen him run north over the hill through the furze."

I got off my horse again, but this time I could do little for poor Shaun. One of his eyes was knocked clean away—I would rather he had been killed by the dog. I lifted him up and took him home in my arms, and the next morning, with a sorry heart, I put a bullet through his head. Poor little Shaun! I wonder if it will ever come to that with me.

I had no proofs against Herlihy: all I could do was to determine to get the last penny of his rent out of him, and, if ever the chance came in my way, to show him as little mercy as he had shown Shaun.

The chance has not come yet; but if I pull through this thing that is on me now, please God I will pay Shaun's debt and a little trifle I owe Dan Herlihy on my own account, honestly and with interest.

However, at the time there was nothing for me to do but sit still, and it was just three weeks later that I was told one morning that a woman was at the door wanting to speak to me. It was Herlihy's wife, a gaunt careworn-looking creature, who kept her head covered up in the hood of her cloak, and spoke in a hoarse frightened voice.

"Sir, your honour," she began, "niver say the word to Dan that I come here. Sure I'd have come before, but I wouldn't be let by him." She paused and then went on hurriedly:

"There was a person said you were bit by our dog that time you rode into Bludth yisterday three weeks. Your honour, sir," she said, coming a step nearer, "whatever way the dog was that

day, the day after he was runnin' mad thro' the counthry, and the polis couldn't kill him till he had three of Mahony's cows bitten, and himself half dead with the boys hunting him."

"How do you know he was mad?"

"Ere yistherday was the twenty-first day with the cows, and wan of thim's dead already."

"Who was the person said I was bitten?"

She began to cry:

"Oh, that I'd have it to say of my own husband! Dan seen it, your honour! he was inside in the house and he seen you tying up your hand, and he never let on a word till after the cow's dying, an' thin he says, 'There'll be more that way!' says he. 'Why so?' says I, and he says——"

I cut her story short. My temper is none of the best, and the less I heard about Dan Herlihy the better.

"I am obliged to you for your trouble," I said; for after all she had come a long way to tell me of what she believed to be my danger. "Here is something for you, and go round to the cook and get some dinner. And then you may go home and tell your blackguard of a husband that I am quite well and mean to keep so, and that he'll hear more of me before he's done with me."

With that I put a couple of shillings in her hand and turned my back upon her. She took the money as if she only half liked doing so and went slowly on round the house to the yard, while I stood on my hall door steps and began to think over what she had just told me.

My house is built high up on a hill-side and there is a fine view from the front of it. You look straight out over rough tumbling hills to the sea, and the Shannon lies to the south, cutting the country in two like the bright blade of a knife. There was hardly a touch of white in the blue sky that April morning. Very high up there was a lark singing; in the lower levels of the air plover were wheeling and whistling; the wind brought the soft spring-music of the bleating of lambs to me in purring waves of sound. It shook the fuchsia hedge that was sprouting at the foot of the garden and brought the crisp sheaths of the elm-tree buds fluttering down on to the ground.

I suppose I noticed these things then, or I should not be able to feel them so clearly now—but I do not remember doing so. I stared at the purple mark on my right hand where the wound made by the dog's teeth had been. It was too late now for any of the ordinary rough and ready cures; and the probability seemed to be that as I had kept well up to this, nothing was going to happen to me and I need take no precautionary measures. Indeed only for the cows I don't believe I would have thought twice about it, but their dying certainly gave me a bit of a shake; and the talk I had with the dispensary doctor not long ago, about this Monsieur Pasteur's cure for hydrophobia, recurred to me—(though

to tell the truth, little Considine said he had no such great opinion of it)—and I had been feeling unsettled and restless for some time; in fact, putting one thing and another together, I thought the best thing I could do was to start off for Paris as soon as I could.

I do not mean to pretend that I had or have much faith in this system of Pasteur's. I had heard only very little of it from Doctor Considine, and had read about as much in the newspapers; and I think I am not disposed to believe new things very readily. I am a bit of a fatalist and don't hold much with doctors. If you live for seven or eight years in one of the remotest parts of Ireland, your intellectual part gets very sodden; and being bred up for a priest is bad training for the mind. I had to swallow so many queer stories of the old-fashioned miracles when I was a boy that I have no capacity for new ones: it is as much as I can do to hold on to the beliefs that were taught me at school; and after all, with all the trouble they gave me to believe them, they do not seem to make much difference in my life or any one else's.

The doctors and the priests do their best—first the one and then the other; but hereabouts I think the "mountainymen," who see little of either, get on just as well as the rest. However, all this is neither here nor there—as they say—and to come back to where I started from, whether I believed in Pasteur or no, it was well worth taking the off-chance of following his treatment, when it involved getting away from Carrig Frass. Even if I were going to die in a week, I would be glad to live that last week in Paris.

There was a little hotel towards the lower end of the Rue des Saints Pères that I knew very well. My only friend in Paris, outside the walls of the seminary, had lived there. He was an American art-student, a distant connection of mine through some long-since emigrated relative, and my rare holidays had always been spent with him.

It did not look the same place to me yesterday afternoon, when I arrived cold and tired after my long journey. There is a new proprietor and the house is all changed: the big pots with prickly shrubs in them no longer block up the doorway and I missed old Hector, the big dog who used to sprawl across the narrow hall. I looked idly down the list with the names of the inmates, which hung, each name against its respective key, in the bureau, with an illogical hope that after eight years "Wilbur G. Collins" might still be found opposite key No. 56, *au cinquième*; but a name so outlandish that I remember it still—"Zdenka Vorschak"—was what I saw. I don't even know if it is a man's or a woman's.

It was a dark gloomy evening. The rain and wind that had beaten against the windows of Carrig Frass all that long night—the night before my start—the night after Bridget Herlihy had told me the dog was mad—had faithfully followed me. The rain and that fierce west wind had travelled express across England

and France as well as I, and were seemingly as undefeated here in Paris as they had been at home.

I was very tired, and I went to bed early, but I could not sleep for a long time. Most of the old hotels on the farther side of the Seine have as many rooms as a beehive has cells, and the thinness of the partition walls in the Hôtel Saint Roch spared me none of the pounding of pianos, the trampings to and fro, and the noisy good-nights which went on till past twelve. Piercing through these rougher sounds I had heard the voice of a violin; and as they one by one fell into silence, the violin notes grew louder and stronger. It was a wild, miserable sort of music, the like of which I had never heard before. It kept me awake for a long time, and when I got to sleep at last I believe it mixed some way with my dreams.

I thought that I was back in Carrig Frass, and that there were dogs howling round the house. Then the howling died into a long cry, like as if some one was being killed. But whatever was happening I could not move to give any help. I was dead, paralyzed, all but my bitten right hand, which kept clutching at my throat as if it were possessed, and wanted to tear it out of me.

My father used to tell me I was no better than an old woman for believing in dreams; and though there never was any one less superstitious than I am, I don't like a bad dream any more than another man.

Anyhow, when I awoke, two or three hours ago, I felt anything but refreshed. It is a dim, wet morning, and while the faint noises of the street have with the strengthening light slowly crept into my room, I have occupied myself by writing this rough account of how I have come here, and I will continue to do the same so long as anything happens that seems to me worth the trouble of writing out.

April 10th.

Well, I have been to M. Pasteur, and he and the rest have shaken their heads over me, and said I have come too late and that it is a bad case.

I would like to know what reason they have for saying that. I cannot even be sure if it was Shaun or the mad dog that bit me; and, anyhow, I came as soon as I could. They tell me I must go to them twice, mornings and evenings, but I will not. If they cannot get enough poison into me once in a day they will have to be content to let me be a decimal on the wrong side of their average of cures. Dr. Considine told me it was only once a day they injected the stuff—"and quite often enough too," he said, and he is a smart little man and knows what he is talking about. I am not going to have anything to say to their "intensive treatment," and so I told them—I more than half think I was a fool for coming at all. Paris is not what I remember it, and I am very lonely here with no one to speak to.

Yesterday morning was my first visit to M. Pasteur's, and I went there again to-day. It is a curious place, and they are a funny crew of people that you see there, from every nation on the earth, all waiting to have what you would think was worse than death put into their veins for the sake of getting life out of it. I could not help wondering for how many of them the bargain would turn out successfully.

There was a strange-looking girl got into the same tram as I did, when I was leaving the Panthéon yesterday. She had more soft greyish-yellow hair than she knew what to do with. It was wound in big wisps over her head like ropes of hay—"soogawns" we call them at home—and her eyes looked like wells of some pale yellow-green oil. I could not get her face out of my mind last night, while that fellow kept me awake with his fiddling. I wished he was dead, with his dirges.

This morning I met that girl again. This time I was in the Rue d'Ulm, just leaving the École Normale after my daily dose of poison. She looked very hard at me. I wonder if she recognized my white face and foxy hair again.

April 12th.

I never used to be much of a one to keep a diary, but now it seems I have taken a new turn. Perhaps it is what the old women call the change before death (though I don't believe I'm going to die at all). The night before last—just after I had made the last entry—the fiddling began again, worse than ever, screaming and crying like some creature in mortal pain. I was cross and tired, and I could not stand it. I rang for the *garçon* in vain, and finally I left my room, and making my way up the steep stairs to the next *étage*, I knocked at the door of the musician.

An inner door opened and shut, and then the door I was at was opened a very little.

"I ask pardon, monsieur," I began, "but I am an invalid, and your violin prevents me from sleeping."

The door was opened more widely, and I heard an exclamation in a woman's voice. The gas in the passage had been put out, and the lamp in the room behind her did not give much light, but with even less I should still have recognized the girl with the yellow hair.

"I regret that I have disturbed you, monsieur," she said in French, with a certain soft foreign accent that puzzled me as to her nationality. "I also am an invalid," she laughed a little, "but with me it is different—my violin helps me to sleep."

She turned and spoke to some one in the inner room, in a language which I had never heard before. An oldish woman came forward with the lamp in her hand.

"Rado, hold the light that monsieur may descend these charming stairs in safety," said the girl in French; "bonsoir, monsieur." She went into the inner room, slamming the door behind her, and

the servant stood with the lamp outside at the head of the stairs, until I had turned down the corridor to my own room.

What she had meant by saying that infernal fiddling sent her to sleep, I could not imagine. I like music well enough at a proper time, and as far as I could judge, she played remarkably well; but at one o'clock in the morning to be kept awake by screams and lamentations like an old woman keening at a funeral was more than I could stand.

And why had she laughed? Altogether she was a curious girl, and I wondered if I should meet her again out of doors next morning.

I looked out for her in the Rue d'Ulm and at the omnibus bureau outside the Panthéon, where I had seen her before. I thought it likely that she was taking lessons in music or the like, from some of the many teachers who live thereabouts. But I did not see her. I strolled on down the Rue du Panthéon, feeling very low in my mind. The doctors had been abusing me for not coming to them more than once a day; but, as I told them before, if they cannot cure me with one dosing per diem they will have to do without. Whatever, I believe I am as well as ever I was; it was only the sudden change from cold to hot spring weather that made me feel depressed and sick.

I looked in at the shop windows as I passed, and dull they were too. They are mostly all bookshops in the Rue du Panthéon, and although to speak French is as easy to me as to speak English, I do not care much about French literature; certainly not technical medical works such as filled one window at which I had stopped. A young girl was standing at it, apparently trying to read a pamphlet that was lying open inside. She turned round with a start, as I stood still behind her, and I saw it was the fair-haired violinist.

"Good morning, mademoiselle," I said, taking off my hat (being resolved not to let slip this opportunity of speaking to her); "I trust the cessation of the music last night did not keep you awake? It had the contrary effect upon me."

She lifted the pale yellow lashes that half concealed her eyes. "No, monsieur—the charm had worked; I slept well."

I wondered in my own mind what she meant by this, but I did not like to ask her. She had turned to study the pamphlet again; I saw it was one by a celebrated French doctor on "*La Rage*," and I felt, naturally, a sort of personal curiosity as to why she was reading it.

"Mademoiselle is interested in that subject?" I began again.

She turned upon me with a kind of defiance: "And why should I not be?" she laughed a little excitedly, but there was a hunted, frightened look in her face. "Is not every one talking of *la rage* now? You—you yourself seem to be interested in this illness; or else why do you go daily to M. Pasteur's?"

She said this still with a gay manner, but she watched closely for my answer.

"I am one of his patients, mademoiselle," I answered.

All the laughter left her face. She got very white.

"And so am I also," she said slowly, as if the words were forced out of her, her big eyes wide open, and looking as if a light had suddenly gone out behind them as she stared into my face.

April 17th.

The more I see of her, the more she perplexes me, and the more I think of her. Indeed, I keep thinking of very little else, these times, and I try to clear my head by writing as much down as I can.

There is a little *salon* in this hotel where no one ever sits, though it is supposed to be for the use of *pensionnaires*. I told her I was very lonely by myself all the long evenings, and I asked her would she come there after dinner and talk to me. I asked her that the second day after I spoke to her in the street, and she said she would come.

It is a dark little hole of a room, with nothing in it but a table and a hard little red velvet-covered sofa, and two or three chairs; and all the *garçon* would do for me to make it more cheerful was to light a couple of feeble flares of gas in the chandelier thing overhead.

(I think I might as well say here that the day I met her was the last on which I went to the doctor's. I was tired of it. I had lost faith somehow—if I ever had any—when they said I had come too late. I do not believe there is a thing that ails me. It was as likely Shaun's teeth that tore me as the other dog's. Anyhow, I will leave that fact to be found out by the practical test of time.)

I had been waiting in the little *salon*, and I was thinking of her all the time, but I did not hear her enter the room. She came lightly in, and the first I knew was another face reflected beside my own in the mirror over the chimney-piece where I was standing. It was a bad glass that gave everything a blue-green tone. It looked like a drowned woman that I saw in it.

She had on a long curious-looking white gown, with black and gold and red embroidering on it. She saw me look at it as I turned round and spoke to her.

"That is our Slavisch embroidery," she said, without taking any notice of what I said to her; "you seem to me, monsieur, a very incurious person. This is now the third or fourth time that we have spoken to each other, and yet you have asked me neither my name nor my nation; but I will tell them to you. My name is Zdenka Vorschak, and my country is Hungary. I am a Slav." She sat down as she spoke on the sofa by the wall; what light there was was full on her face. "And you?" she said.

I had known her name well enough, but I had waited for her to tell it to me herself. Now I answered the latter half of what she had said.

"I am Irish, mademoiselle, and my name is Pierce Cormac."

"You speak French very well. Have you been long in Paris?"

"I have been here before, but not for some years. I only came to this hotel a week ago."

"You have only been here, *chez Pasteur*, for a week? Then, when did it happen?"

I did not at first understand her.

"Happen?" I repeated stupidly, and I looked at her face for explanation.

Her eyes were fixed on my right hand, where the marks of the dog's teeth were still plain enough, for he had given me an ugly gash. Then it flashed on me what she was driving at, and I began to tell her how I had been bitten. As I spoke, my story became fuller and fuller. I told her of my life up to the day on which its current had been so unexpectedly changed. I told her everything that I have written here, and more, being held to speaking, and compelled to say all that was in my heart, yes, and more than I had thought was there, by the stress of her strange eyes. I felt almost giddy, as if I were looking into changing water, and it was not until I had finished speaking that I could take my gaze out of hers.

Then I saw how much paler she was than she had been when first she came into the room.

"I have tired you, mademoiselle," I said anxiously; "my story has been too long and tedious."

She did not mind what I said.

"There is something still that you have not told me," she said eagerly; "what was the day on which this happened?"

"I thought I had told you—the 13th of March, in the afternoon. I have always been quite sure of the date, as it chanced to be my birthday."

She looked at me as if she scarcely believed what I said.

"Mon Dieu, this story becomes very amusing," she said with a little laugh; "that day with the unlucky number is also my birthday. I wonder if there are any other points of resemblance. What was he like, *par exemple*, this dog who attacked yours? The dog who ——" She stopped without ending her sentence.

"He was a big grey brute," I answered, "brindled, with blueish-white eyes that had black centres to them no larger than an oat."

Her whole expression changed while I was speaking: there was nothing but fear in her face now.

"Holy Jesu," she said in a low voice, as if she had forgotten that I was there; "it was the same; that was what he was like—the creature who attacked me. I saw him running," she went on in the same frightened whisper, "running, a little speck on our broad white road; and then he was close to me. I could hear his gaspings; I could see his eyes like pale flames; it was the same, I tell you!" she cried wildly; "he was a devil; on the same day he destroyed us both; we shall both die ——"

She was standing up now, shaking from head to foot, and moving her hands in a way that somehow helped me to picture what she was describing. I took them both in mine, meaning to lead her back to the little sofa where she had been sitting. They closed on my hands with a nervous pressure that sent a thrill through me.

"Do you feel it?" she whispered; "it is burning as if there were teeth of fire in it. You cannot see it, your hand covers it. It was *my* right hand also that he tore; but you can feel it, you can feel it in your own."

Her voice broke off with a little sigh, and I felt her hold of my hands slacken.

I had never seen a woman faint before, having had but little to say to them one way or the other, and I did not know what I ought to do. But I am a big man, being a good bit over six feet high, and strong at that; and I just gathered her up in my arms and set out to carry her upstairs to her own room.

Though she is slight for her height, the carrying of her up those steep slippery stairs was no easy matter, and joined to the dread of stumbling was the fear that I might meet some one on the way. But by some lucky chance there was no one either on the stairs or about the passages. Her room was on the fourth *étage*, and I stopped outside her door to draw my breath.

Her head was on my right shoulder; her soft hair tickled my cheek. On my left shoulder lay her hand, her right hand. I could see plainly the dark scar where the dog had bitten her. I half knelt down in order to support her on my knee while I knocked at the door for her servant; but before I knocked I took her scarred hand in mine and kissed it.

April 24th.

Now that I have begun the trick of keeping this kind of diary it has got to be a necessity with me. I believe if I was dying I would still be trying to scrawl what was happening to me. Though why I talk of dying I don't know. It is the 42nd day with me now since I was bitten, and I see that there are only three cases recorded in which the time between the date when a man is bitten and when he goes mad is longer than that. I believe if there ever was any danger for either of us it is all over now. It certainly was a curious coincidence that she should have been bitten on the same day as I was, but I cannot say I think anything of that; and still less do I mind her foolish fancies about the dogs being alike. Herlihy's dog was just a common brindled cur, and it would be a much funnier thing if there were not a good many others like him in the world, than if there were an odd one of the same type.

However, as I am for ever saying to her, we are both quite sound and fit, and it might be the same dog or devil either, twenty times over, for all I care.

She and I meet each other now every day. We meet at 12 o'clock, at *déjeuner*, and after that we generally walk down to the river, and then along under the horse-chestnuts, that have all broken into full leaf during these last warm days, to the Pont d'Iéna, and so on into the gardens of the Trocadéro, where there is every sweet shrub flowering and the birds singing, and I think of Carrig Frass and thank God I'm not there.

She knows no one in Paris any more than I do. Her people, I think, are very poor. She was talking to me a few days ago about her loneliness here, and she said she had only just enough to keep her and her servant for the six weeks for which they had settled to come here, and to pay their way back to Southern Hungary again. Her six weeks will be up this day week. She has taken the treatment regularly, and I should think she is as safe as any one can be, but it is easy to see that she does not think so herself. She has often a flighty, excitable way with her that shows the state her nerves are in. She badly wants some one to look after her.

To-day she was telling me about her life in that big flat silent country she comes from. The long quiet plains, speckled as far as you can see with flocks of sheep and herds of cattle and horses; the little villages dotted here and there over the wide sea of grass, and the Danube, sweeping its burden of rafts and barges between fringes of poplar into the level blue distance, seem to fulfil all her ideas of what a landscape ought to be. I believe I could show her something better than that at home in the county Clare.

She says she is going to be a musician, and until she came here all her days were given to practising the violin with that object in view.

"Here, I have to give up my eight hours a day," she said with a look at me that had laughter behind it though her face was quite serious; "the *pensionnaires* might not like it. But I play as much as I can," she went on; "it is my violin that keeps me alive—only for it——" She broke off and leaned towards me across the little yellow tin table at which we were sitting; for we were in our usual quiet corner in the gardens of the Trocadéro. "Were you disturbed by my playing last night?"

"It was a hot night," I answered evasively, "I should not have slept in any case." Indeed, long after she had ceased, I had lain awake tossing and thinking, thinking——

"There are some nights," she went on quickly, with the scared white look coming into her face which I had seen in it before, "when I must play; then I cannot hear the sound of its feet galloping softly towards me, and its pantings. Last night I thought of you, and I would not play more. I put the violin away and I put out the light and got into my bed. I told myself I was an imbecile, I would not listen; but it came, I heard it coming across the floor—Rado was asleep; she was snoring so loudly you

would have thought I could hear nothing else, but I knew it was there."

"How did you know it?" I said, though I knew I was a fool to encourage her in speaking of such fancies.

Her right hand was lying on the table, ungloved; my eyes followed hers to the purple mark of the now healed wound.

"He licked it," she said, "he laid his hot tongue on it; there, on the place where he had bitten it——"

Her face was quivering and she kept giving quick short looks to every side, as if she expected to see the creature she had dreamed of, coming again to attack her.

It was more than I could stand, to sit there and watch her. I got up and walked round the table and sat down by her side.

"Dear mademoiselle," I said, taking her cold hand in mine, "these are all fancies. Your nerves are strung too high, and your imagination plays on them as you do on your violin. You soon will leave Paris, and will forget all about this trouble and everything connected with it. I suppose I ought to hope that for that reason you will also forget me, but I am not capable of so much unselfishness."

I tried to make my voice sound as little serious as I could, but it shook a bit in spite of me. Something in the touch of her hand unsteadied me, and the speaking of her going away had made the thought of her doing so more of a reality than it had ever been before.

"But I cannot forget," she answered, quickly withdrawing her hand from mine. "It hangs over me always—I am not afraid of death, but it is the shame of it—to die like an animal—or to be smothered; they did that to a man in a village near us who was mad. Promise me," she said, turning her shining frightened eyes upon me, "promise me if it comes upon me here that you will shoot me—I shall not mind that—there would be no degradation in dying like that—I would not ask you, but you are the only friend I have in Paris."

I tried to answer her, but I could find no words. A passion of love and pity was fighting with the knowledge that a man with death at his elbow, as I have, has no right to speak of such things. She watched my face anxiously.

"Will you not promise?" she said. "I know there might be danger for you too—but I thought—I hoped——"

My self-control broke down. I said no word to her, but I took her in my arms and kissed her many times. I was mad for the moment. I forgot everything but the sense that she was in my arms, held tight up against my heart, with the wind blowing her hair all about my hot forehead, and her sweet lips giving their sweetness to me.

I do not know what I said to her and the few words that she whispered to me—while the wind in the young leaves, and the clear

whistling of the birds, and love made an undersound of songs together in my heart—they are sacred, and will never be known until I die, and the blessed saints read them in my soul, where they are written in pure fire and will burn for ever. But after a time we awoke again to our usual lives; and though our eyes were still dazzled by the light of that high place where our souls had been, we began to see the shadow that we had both for a time escaped from.

It was evening when we walked home, and the last low rays of the sun were breaking in sparkles on the swift Seine.

"Dear," she said, "I know now that it is true what a gipsy woman at home once told me and I am glad of it. She said my life was knitted in with that of another. 'Whoever he is,' she said, 'he was born under the same star as thou wert, and his fate is thine.'"

I have sat up late to write all this. They always say that the happier some men are the more they look forward for trouble. I do not think that I am usually given that way myself, but there is one thing I would like to say to which I have made up my mind. They tell me that the first symptoms of hydrophobia often declare themselves some time, twenty-four hours even, before the actual seizure begins. Should this happen to me—and I have no certainty that it may not do so at any minute—I will just slip away out of the hotel; I will say no good-bye to her—she may think I have forsaken her; anything rather than the truth—I can easily remove from myself all marks of personal identification, and then I will know what to do.

She will never find out, even if by chance she should ever again hear of me, the real reason of my death, and she will be cheated out of that belief in our sharing the same fate, which might so work on her nerves as to bring upon her that which I would die a thousand thousand times to keep from her.

April 25th, 11.30 p.m.

I should like to finish this off. I should like to think that into whose hands it may some day fall, it will make clear what would otherwise never be known. And perhaps after some years, whoever reads it will let her know what was the truth of it all. I have time enough for that before I lock this manuscript into my trunk and send it off by itself home again to Carrig Frass.

I have been with her all day, and we were very happy. She has promised to marry me soon—quite soon—in a few days. Mother of God, from whose work I turned my hand, give me strength.

She asked me after the *table d'hôte* dinner this evening to come to her own little sitting-room to have some tea. She handed me the cup and I raised it to my lips, but as I tried to drink there came a spasm in my throat, and I felt I could not swallow. It frightened me, but I said nothing, and we sat for a long time talking and making plans of what we would do when we were

married. Every moment that I was near her, every stir of her hand in mine, every touch of her soft cheek as she leant her head on my shoulder, sent a rush through my veins of keen love and desire to live; and even then I was beginning to know that it was for me a mockery to talk of the future.

She saw that I had not drunk my tea. "I will give you more," she said, "this is cold."

She gave it to me, and when she did not see, I tried again to drink it; and again the spasm and the rigid contraction of all the muscles in my throat. So I told her I did not care for it; and I said good-night to her; that it was late, and I had much to do before I could sleep. God knows I have much to do, but I shall sleep sound enough when it is done.

I kissed her twice, three times, as a dying man kisses a crucifix, but to me those kisses brought no hope.

It is nearly midnight and I must stop. I leave her to God—may He have mercy on my soul.

PIERCE CORMAC.

* * * * *

Extract from "Le Soir," April 26.

"This morning in a remote corner of the gardens of the Trocadero was found the body of a young man. He had apparently committed suicide. In his hand was a revolver, one chamber of which had been fired, evidently by himself. He is very tall, and his appearance is that of a foreigner. No name or marks of identification of any kind were found upon the body, which has been taken by the police to the Morgue."

Extract from "Le Petit Journal," April 27.

"Yesterday evening in the Hospital —, a young Hungarian lady, by name Zdenka Vorschak, died of what is believed to have been rabies. The unfortunate young lady has been under the treatment of M. Pasteur, and it is apprehended that some violent shock to the nervous system, combined with her own constant dread of hydrophobia, caused a nerve crisis in which many of the phases of rabies were closely simulated. Her death was, however, unattended by the more violent symptoms of this frightful malady, and we understand that some difference of opinion prevails among the physicians as to its true cause."

"SHEBA."

A STUDY OF GIRLHOOD.

By "RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "DAME DURDEN," "DARBY AND JOAN," "THE LADY NANCY,"
"GRETCHEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

"*GOTT im Himmel!*" cried old Müller, staring aghast at an agitated figure pacing to and fro their quiet sitting-room. "What say you? Marry her—marry Sheba Ormatroyd! You, the woman-hater—the anchorite! *Was ist denn mit ihr?*"

"What can I do?" said Meredith, dragging a chair up to the table and gazing moodily at his friend's face. "I love the girl—more than words can say. I have avoided her, as you know, because . . . because I feared my strength . . . It was no use—she is wretched. Her life will be ruined if she stays with those people—and the mother . . . Heavens! if you had heard her—and they seem determined to force her into the arms of this French libertine. I know enough of him. As I told you, he is behind the scenes nearly every night—and I know for a fact he has ruined that pretty little Coralie Grey, the dancer. Faugh—it is sacrilege to think of Sheba even in his presence."

"And so," said Müller gravely, "you—love—each other. I am surprised, and yet I always thought the girl looked upon you as a sort of hero. She is very romantic, you know—but she is so young. Are you sure, *lieber Freund*, that you can trust her? Remember your first lesson."

"I do," said the young man growing very pale and with a hardening of the lips that made his face look strangely stern. "I remembered it so long that I have scarcely even spoken to Sheba Ormatroyd when she has been here. It was hard enough, sometimes. Those beautiful eloquent eyes used to gaze at me so innocently and beseechingly."

"But," said Müller, lighting his big pipe as was his wont in any case of discussion, "there are complications—you remember you told me your story. Is it safe, think you, to marry without proof that you are free?"

"I have the best proof—*his* word," answered Meredith moodily. "Besides, she deserted me. She has no longer a claim."

"True," said the old German. "But if Sheba knew—would she marry you? that is the question. Women are so odd, you know, such sticklers for ceremony. And if anything should chance hereafter——"

"How could it? What nonsense you talk," exclaimed the young man impatiently. "Even if—she—were not dead as that ruffian swore, she has no legal right or claim on me, and I am not the sort of man to play the deceiver. I love Sheba Ormatroyd as I never thought to love living woman, and I would be true to her with or without legal compulsion—that I swear."

"Oh," said Müller indifferently, "as for forms and ceremonies, you know what I think of them! No man ought to marry if he cannot of himself be true to the woman he loves. Feeling *that* is absolutely certain, he needs not the mummery of a priest's words to make the union holy. But that is all very well, only would Sheba think so?"

"We can be married by a registrar," said Meredith. "There is no need for the religious ceremony at all, and no likelihood of it," he added bitterly, "for it will certainly be a case of running off with her. That mother of hers will never consent. You ought to have heard her abuse me and my position, Müller; it would have done your heart good: she looks upon music as a disgrace, it appears, and I am a sort of licensed mountebank, dressed up to sing and act at so much a night. There is a new view of your adored art for you!"

"Phooh!" said the old man contemptuously, "does the prating of fools make any difference to the laws of existence? Why waste breath in combating the ignorance of a small section of humanity? You ought to know better than to care for such pin-pricks."

"It is not that I—care," said Meredith; "I am too proud and too fond of my art to heed what such people as these Levisons say; only it surprised me somewhat to see one light in which it is viewed."

Then he rose and began his pacing of the room. "What is to be done?" he said again. "In a week I go to Queensland."

"Take her with you," said Müller, puffing huge clouds up to the ceiling.

"Easier said than done," answered Meredith gloomily.

The old man laughed. "Nay, *mein Lieber*, have you played Romeo on the stage and know not how to act it in reality?" he said. "Has not Cupid laughed at parents and guardians, and locks and bolts from time immemorial? Tell her she must decide—I make little doubt she will—and in your favour. For the rest I can play the protecting father till you are able to marry her; she will be quite safe."

"Safe!" cried Meredith hotly. "I should think so. Do you fancy I am a blackguard like Pharamond?"

"Softly, softly," said Müller, with his little smile. "I know

what it is to be young and hot-blooded, and how sometimes the very best intentions are frustrated by—nature. Then there is the law to be considered, you know. Is she of legal age to contract a marriage without consent of parents—eh? If not, will there be hue and cry and pursuit after Signor Paoletti? It won't do, you know, to ruin your professional prospects for sake of a love affair."

"There will be no fear of *that*," said Meredith. "From what I could judge of her mother's feelings she won't trouble her head about the girl once she takes the law into her own hands. The question is—how am I to communicate with her?"

"Write, of course," said Müller.

"I fear she will not be allowed to receive letters."

"Is there no friend within the citadel?" inquired the old man. "Hard if there is not."

"I cannot tell," said Paul gloomily. "I never entered the house till to-day, and," he added fervently, "I never wish to do so again." At this moment there came a loud ring at the bell.

Müller looked up. "The post," he said. "If it should be——"

They both turned eagerly to the door, and a moment later the servant entered with a letter. Paul seized it; his brow clouded. "No," he said, "it is not her writing." He opened the envelope with languid and indifferent fingers, and glanced carelessly at its contents. Suddenly his face grew eager. "Good heavens!" he said. "Müller, listen to this:

"DEAR SIR,

"I have heard from my friend Miss Ormatroyd of the difficult position in which you are both placed. I am her great—in fact, her only—friend, and it is needless to say how deeply I feel for her. As you may suppose, Mrs. Levison has forbidden her to write to you; but I feel justified in setting at defiance so arbitrary a command. If, therefore, you wish to communicate with her you are quite at liberty to do so *through me*, for I am fortunately staying with the Levisons on a visit, and shall be only too happy to assist my poor friend, who is in a heart-broken and almost desperate state. She is to be kept a close prisoner in her own room until she agrees to accept this other suitor, of whom you have heard. It remains for you therefore to come to the rescue, if possible. At all events, let me assure you that you at least have a friend and assistant in

"Your humble servant,

"BESSIE SAXTON."

"What a curious letter," said Müller. "It sounds to me like a trap. Do you know this girl?"

"No," said Meredith, gazing with evident perturbation at the large, bold handwriting; "but I have heard Sheba speak of her,

and it opens up a possibility of communication, you see. What do you suspect?"

Müller took the letter and examined it carefully. "I should say she was not quite—true," he said thoughtfully; "but then you know I never believe in women's friendships, still less do I believe they are ready to assist one another in a love affair, unless there is some hidden motive. However, that we cannot discover yet. You had better write to Sheba under cover of this very friendly young lady. Be cautious what you say, for the letter may fall into other hands. If she receives it safely, time enough to fix your plans."

"I think," said Meredith gravely, "I will give the parents one more chance. I will write to her stepfather, and formally ask his consent. If he refuses——"

"Which he is sure to do," said Müller. "I suspect he is a led-by-the-nose husband, with a virago of a wife."

"Well," laughed Meredith, "let me give him the chance of proving his mastership. Of course if he says no also, I must ask Sheba to decide for herself."

"And if I know her at all she is just the girl to do so," said Müller, "and," he added softly, "just the girl to make you happy, my poor Paul. She has a grand nature, and God knows your life has been a hard and cold one long enough. It is time you had the comfort of a woman's love, and Sheba, ah, how she *will* love! That great, ardent, repressed soul! What treasures lie there. Happy Paul! For the first time in my grim, book-wormish, selfish life I envy youth, and hope, and passion." He laid down his pipe as he spoke, and with a short nod of farewell, went off to his own room.

Paul saw him no more that night.

* * * * *

The formal proposal to Mr. Levison was answered by the return of Meredith's own letter without any comment. It was such an insult that even the placid, easy-going old German was roused to fierce anger. As for Paul himself, he now felt at liberty to act independently of Sheba's relatives altogether, and soon a regular communication was established between them by means of Bessie Saxton.

Time was hastening on. The company had to start almost immediately for Queensland, and Mrs. Levison, knowing this, redoubled her vigilance over Sheba. Once the hateful opera people were gone, she felt she could breathe freely, and in the meantime, being utterly unsuspecting of Bessie Saxton's double-dealing, she communicated everything to that young lady.

The dinner-party was fixed for the very night that the obnoxious suitor was to start, and Mrs. Levison found she had no difficulty in persuading Count Pharamond to stay the night at Oaklands.

She had informed him that Sheba would give him a definite

reply on that occasion, and he had professed his entire willingness to wait until then.

"You see, count," said Mrs. Levison, "my daughter is very young and timid, and she has not as yet given any serious consideration to the subject of matrimony. She likes you exceedingly, however, and I must trust to your eloquence to convince her that marriage is not such a terrible ordeal after all."

The count's eyes sparkled beneath their lowered lids. "Ah, madame," he said, "how charming it is, that modest reticence, that girlish fear of—they know not what. How admirable must have been the training that leaves such freshness and purity in the virgin heart, folded like a bud which the ardent sun of love alone may open into perfect bloom."

"Yes, count, yes," said Mrs. Levison rather vaguely. "You speak like a poet, really. How admirably you will suit my dear child; she is so romantic herself."

But Pharamond was not one whit blinded by Mrs. Levison's manoeuvres. He felt sure that Sheba did not care for him in the least, and did not want to marry him. That, however, made no difference to his intentions. He was far too used to seeing marriages "arranged" in the commonplace, cold-blooded French fashion, to care whether his intended wife had any favourable regard for him, or not.

Marriage would soon settle all that girlish romantic nonsense, and he had never before seen any woman capable of inspiring that mingling of passion, desire and inaccessibility that made up Sheba's charm for him. He was determined she should be his, and the fact that she kept him off and would not at once accept his suit, rather added zest to its enforcement. The parents were on his side—as a matter of course the girl would give in also.

Meantime, he amused himself with Bessie. All that week Sheba remained a prisoner in her own room, seeing no one but her mother and Bessie Saxton. Every day Mrs. Levison formally reiterated her question, "Will you accept Count Pharamond?" and every day came the same dogged reply, "No, I will not." Mrs. Levison grew alarmed as the day of the dinner-party drew nigh. Sheba must appear at it, and she had told the count he should have his answer then.

She felt assured that no communication had taken place between Sheba and Meredith, yet she felt at a loss to account for the girl's radiant looks and obstinate firmness. Was it possible that she had some hope, some scheme for deliverance? Bessie Saxton laughed and assured her it was impossible, still when the night really arrived Mrs. Levison was in a state of fever and anxiety, that even sal-volatile and other remedies could not quite allay. As the hour struck, and one by one the invited guests assembled, she grew even more nervous.

Pharamond appeared, calm, radiant and hopeful, and dressed

with his usual exquisite care. Then, as Mrs. Levison's nervous glance went from the clock to the door, it was thrown open and Bessie Saxton and Sheba entered the room.

Sheba wore the same dress that she had worn when Pharamond had first seen her, and he thought she looked even more lovely. There was a repressed fire—a something wild, eager, excited about the girl that stimulated his jaded passions, and lent her additional charm.

He greeted her almost as a lover, and her cold return of his words and looks in no way damped their ardour.

"It will be something to fire and change all that," he said to himself, with a little fierce exultant glow at his heart. "It will not last, of course, any more than the bloom of the peach—still, mine will be the lips to kiss off the bloom. For the rest—*n'importe*."

Then dinner was announced, and for the first time in her life Sheba laid her hand on his proffered arm, and followed by many a curious and watchful gaze went out of the room by his side.

All during dinner she scarcely spoke. Only now and then her eyes—frightened and full of dread—turned to Bessie Saxton, who was seated opposite. Then, as if deriving comfort or encouragement from that source, she would resume her pretence of eating, or again return to those stiff monosyllabic replies which was all the response she made to the count's eloquence. It amused him to watch her blushes and her evident distress, just as it added zest to his dinner to glance at a tiny note under cover of his *serviette*—a note which had been slipped into his hand as he had greeted Bessie Saxton.

"*Diable!*" he thought, "she gets imprudent. However, it is not for me to say nay to the caprices of a pretty woman."

When the long wearisome meal was over, he contrived to hold the door open for the ladies to pass through, and as Bessie Saxton passed, he whispered low and hurriedly in her ear, "An hour after midnight."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BAFFLED.

WHEN Pharamond re-entered the drawing-room, flushed with wine and bearing himself as a victorious conqueror, he saw that neither Sheba nor Bessie Saxton were there.

Mrs. Levison approached him with apologetic murmurs. "My poor child is suffering with a severe headache," she said; "she begs me to make her excuses. She will see you to-morrow morning in the library at ten o'clock."

Pharamond concealed his disappointment skilfully. He had

fully expected to have the girl's answer to-night. However, a few hours, he told himself, would not be long in passing, and then——

Still his brow looked dark and ominous, the girl was taking too much on herself. He wondered what had made Bessie Saxton retire so early. It was unusual, and it left him to his own resources. He did not like the assembled guests, there was a vulgarity—a self-consciousness about them that grated on his nerves—for bad as his moral character might be, Pharamond was fastidious about society and knew at a glance the difference between social veneer and the real article. He felt decidedly bored, and welcomed most cordially the departure of the last guest and his consequent freedom. He at once retired to his own room, escorted by his servile host. Once there he threw off his dress coat and stiff tie, and putting on a loose soft dressing-gown, established himself in an easy-chair with a cigar, and a French novel.

Silence began to fall over the house. Footsteps died away along the corridors, doors opened and shut, lights were extinguished; Pharamond still read and smoked, and from time to time glanced at the clock ticking loudly on the marble mantelpiece. At last he drew forth a small scented note and once more attentively studied its directions; then approaching the lamp, he lit the paper by its flame and let it slowly smoulder into ashes.

As he did so the clock chimed the hour after midnight. He turned the lamp low, and going to his door, opened it and looked out. The passage was all in darkness. He re-entered his room, lit a candle, and holding it in his hand went out once more and stood in the carpeted corridor, looking down its dark and silent length.

"The third door on the right," he muttered as he blew out the light and placed the candlestick within his own doorway. "*Pardieu!* I don't half like it. If it should be a trick."

* * * * *

Meanwhile Mr. Levison had been detained by one excuse and another from seeking his own dressing-room. His wife had so much to say and to consult him about, that she appeared unwilling he should think of retiring, and even permitted him to smoke his post-prandial cigar in the sacredness of her own luxurious chamber. But the cigar was burnt out, and Mr. Levison's prolonged yawns gave evidence of a growing inclination to pay his devotions to the drowsy god, when suddenly there pealed through the silent house a long piercing shriek.

He started to his feet. Mrs. Levison faced him white and trembling.

"Good God!" he cried. "What's that?"

His wife snatched up a candle and rushed down the corridor; he wondered that she made straight for Sheba's room. It seemed to

him that the cry had come from the other end of the passage, and he ran to a door through which he saw a gleam of light.

Pushing it open unceremoniously, he found himself face to face with Count Pharamond, who, livid with rage and consternation, was supporting in his arms the seemingly unconscious figure of Bessie Saxton!

Her fair hair streamed over her bare white shoulders—her eyes were closed—the loose muslin gown she wore had fallen open at the throat . . . Mr. Levison stared aghast and horror-stricken at the sight.

Then for one brief instant, the instinct of manhood mastered prudence and policy. He sprang forward, and seizing the Frenchman by the throat, he shook him till his teeth chattered like castanets.

"What the devil does this mean?" he shouted fiercely. "How dare you bring your d—d French manners into a respectable house! This young lady is in my charge—under my roof. What are you doing here at this hour?"

Like a beaten cur, yet with rage struggling for supremacy, Pharamond stood there livid and speechless.

Bessie had fallen to the ground—not ungracefully—at the moment when Mr. Levison seized her supporter, and there lay white and still and in picturesque disarray, the first object on which Mrs. Levison's eyes fell as, attracted by the noise, she too rushed into the room.

For a moment she stood there speechless. The blood rushed into her face; shame, disgust and baffled fury thrilled her by turns. The one explanation that seemed possible to herself, showed that she had been the dupe of cleverer and more scheming brains, and the sight of that still white figure seemed to incense her more than the unexplained outrage incensed her indignant husband.

As for Pharamond, he remained absolutely speechless.

When Levison saw his wife, he motioned to her to attend to Bessie, then turning to his guest, he said in a low, fierce tone, "Now, sir, follow me; this must be explained at once."

And Pharamond, with one bitter glance of baffled rage at the still immovable figure, sullenly bowed his head and followed his host from the room.

* * * * *

It was a long time before Mrs. Levison's efforts to restore the unconscious girl were rewarded with success, and when at last Bessie opened her eyes, she appeared far too terrified and exhausted to give any explanation of this occurrence.

She fell from one hysterical fit into another, and Mrs. Levison was well-nigh distracted. She dared not call for assistance, as she was terrified lest the servants should gain any knowledge of the

scandal, and between her fury at the miscarriage of her own plot, and her wrath at Bessie's foolish behaviour and Pharamond's incomprehensible conduct, her state of mind was not enviable.

When the girl at last grew calm and Mrs. Levison could leave her for a moment, she flew in search of her husband.

He was pacing the corridor alone, gloomy and perturbed.

"How is she now?" he asked eagerly as he saw his wife approaching.

"Oh," cried Mrs. Levison impatiently, "she is right enough—what I want to know is where Sheba has gone. She was not in her room when I went there just now. Have you seen her?"

"Not in her room," echoed Mr. Levison wonderingly. "Gracious! has every one gone mad to-night?" He hurried off, his wife following; suddenly he stopped. "By the way," he said, "what made you go to her room? The cry came from the other end of the corridor."

Mrs. Levison looked confused. "I—I thought it came from there," she stammered. She could not say that she had *expected* it to come from there.

They opened the door and went into the room. It was untenanted. The bed had not been slept in. Sheba's evening dress was flung carelessly on it, and as Mrs. Levison rushed from place to place, her cries and exclamations conveyed her fears.

"She has run away, I am sure of it. See—her hat is gone—and her cloak—and her every-day dresses—her linen—her boots . . . Oh, the wicked, treacherous girl—so much for her seeming obedience . . . and after all my plans . . . Oh, what am I to do? . . . What am I to do?"

"Do?" echoed her husband stupidly. "Well, for that matter we can't do anything. She's evidently bolted and that's an end of it. The other case is far more serious. Mr. Saxton confided his daughter to my care. How can I look him in the face after such a disgraceful business? . . . The only thing now is for Pharamond to marry her. It's plain Sheba won't have him. I suppose he's not quite a blackguard, and will make the only reparation a gentleman can."

Mrs. Levison sat up in the chair into which she had fallen, and stared at him in utter stupefaction. "*What* are you saying?" she gasped. "Pharamond marry Bessie . . ." Then a light seemed to break in upon her and her face grew white and set. . . . "I see it all—now," she muttered. "They have both conspired to dupe me. Bessie has helped Sheba to elope with this singer, and it suited her to compromise herself so as to gain the count . . . The vile, bold scheming girl, and I . . . I have been playing into her hand all the time!"

Which in fact was the case, though like many other vain and self-confident people, Mrs. Levison had never dreamed that she was being used as the cat's-paw was used for the roasted chestnuts,

until the scorch of the fire quickened her feelings, and betrayed her folly.

By the next morning every one in the house knew that Sheba Ormatroyd had left her parents' roof, and most of them had heard Mr. Levison's heartily expressed satisfaction at the event, and his declaration that he was deuced glad to be rid of his troublesome step-daughter. In vain Mrs. Levison begged him to follow, or try to find some trace of her; in vain she wept and bemoaned her hard fate during the whole of that day. Her husband was inexorable. He raged and swore. He said that as Sheba had gone off with this man she must abide by the consequences. He never wished to hear of her, or see her again. She had been nothing but a worry and annoyance to him ever since she had been under his roof. He was thankful to wash his hands of her and her affairs once and for all—and the sooner her mother came to his way of thinking the better.

The affair of Bessie Saxton was to his mind much more serious. He had a great respect for Mr. Saxton, and a genuine admiration for the bright, rattling, and amusing Bessie. That such an insult should have been offered to her under his roof angered him far more than Sheba's escapade.

He had "had it out" with the count, to use his own expression, and that high and mighty individual had found himself—for once—fairly taken to task for his profligacy and utterly unable to frame a tenable excuse for what had happened. When Mr. Levison had stormed himself out, there was nothing for it but to say he would do whatever the young lady wished, but having said it, he registered a vow that Bessie should yet pay dearly enough for her trick. Of course it was a trick. He never doubted it now, but he felt none the less furious because he had been duped by it.

As for Bessie herself, she remained in her room all day. No one came near her save Mrs. Levison's maid with an occasional offer of service, or refreshment. Towards dusk, however, she received a note from Mr. Levison and the sight of its contents seemed to restore her to her usual spirits. It was brief, but to the point:

"DEAR MISS SAXTON,

"I feel as if I could never forgive myself for what has happened under my roof, but set your mind at rest. He has promised to marry you as soon as you are willing. Will you give him an interview in my presence and that of Mrs. Levison, at five o'clock this afternoon, to arrange everything? Rest assured I shall never permit a breath of scandal to touch your name, and Pharamond knows it.

"Faithfully yours,

"J. LEVISON

Bessie's eyes sparkled. The languor and indifference left her. She rose from the couch and dressed herself with unusual simplicity, but also with unusual good taste.

There was something chaste, saddened, subdued about her, quite in keeping with her position, as she glided into the library in the falling dusk.

Mr. Levison advanced to meet her with a fatherly and protecting air. His wife, who was seated on a low chair by the window, coldly extended her hand. Pharamond himself moved forward, and bowed low before the white and stately figure. But she met his eye, and a sudden pang of fear blanched her cheek and made her limbs tremble.

"My dear Miss Saxton," said Mr. Levison tenderly, "there is an old proverb that says: 'Least said—soonest mended.' I quite agree with it. In the absence of your father I am here to lay before you the proposal of Count Pharamond. Will you marry him at as early a date as convenient to yourself? he wishes to return to his own land immediately."

Bessie raised her drooping head and looked straight and fearlessly into the count's evil eyes. "Monsieur de Pharamond does me honour," she said quietly. "I accept his proposal."

The Frenchman advanced, and bowed over the hand which he raised to his lips. "Mademoiselle, you have made me the happiest of men," he murmured mendaciously.

The girl withdrew her hand and moved away to the seat where Mrs. Levison was watching the scene. She sank down beside her. "You must forgive me," she murmured in a low, agitated voice. "I—I can explain all; Sheba would never have married him—never—and he . . . Oh! how can I tell you?—he owes it me. I had to do it to . . . to save myself . . . You must not blame me too severely—for I loved him, and he made me believe he loved me. Oh, dear Mrs. Levison, I have no mother . . . no other friend here . . . say you will forgive me, and be my friend as—as you have always been. You know how fond I am of you . . . don't turn against me now."

And Mrs. Levison was so startled and so amazed, and, in a way, so touched by this confession, and the girl's tears and kisses and broken words, that she almost forgot her rage and indignation of the previous night, and ended by promising forgiveness. Mr. Saxton was written to that night—so was Aunt Allison, and Bessie informed Pharamond that with her relatives' sanction she would be prepared to marry him that day month.

She would not see him alone for a single moment, and he left Oaklands and went back to his own rooms in Sydney, feeling that for once in his life he had been outwitted. The feeling was not a pleasant one. He was furious with Sheba, and still more furious with Bessie; but, bad as he was at heart, he had kept her secret, and was prepared to atone for the scandal he had brought upon

her name. A marriage—such a marriage—would not lie very heavily on his sense of moral obligation, so he told himself, and he knew very well that the girl who had outwitted him now, would repent in dust and ashes the day that made her legally his own.

She had gained her object; for the rest, the future would show who would repent most that that object *had* been gained.

CHAPTER XL.

PERIL.

It was full summer.

In the towns people panted and groaned under the burden of a heat which made life scarce endurable. Even up among the hills in the great sheltered bush districts it was bad enough; but there was a possibility of shade and coolness that was impossible in the vigour of busy streets, and unsheltered pavements.

Beyond the shores of Port Philip, and leaving the city far out of sight, stood a low, rambling wooden building—more like a farmhouse than anything else—surrounded by a forest of the invariable eucalyptus trees.

The verandah was almost buried beneath a profusion of creepers, and was dark and cool even in the hot summer afternoon. A few bamboo chairs were scattered about, a low wicker table was covered with books and papers. All the windows were opened and showed the rooms beyond, furnished with a simplicity almost primitive, their only decoration being the lavish display of flowers which stood about in great bowls, or wreathed with overhanging tendrils the wooden brackets on the whitewashed walls. Through one of the windows opening on to the verandah, a girl stepped suddenly, and advancing to the opening where the creepers were curtained off, she looked eagerly out in the direction of the fields beyond.

They were gold now with ripened corn, and beyond the strong rough palings the "bush" stretched in great uneven patches, waiting for further cultivation.

Two or three cows were lying lazily down amidst the short dry grass; at intervals a dog barked, and a bird gave vent to a shrill, clear note, otherwise the stillness was intense as the heat.

The girl shaded her eyes from the sun with one hand, and then apparently distinguishing what she expected, turned aside and began clearing away the litter of books and papers from the table. A little soft smile hovered about her lips, her eyes shone with a steadfast, happy light that made them wondrously beautiful.

The girl, in fact, was no other than Sheba Ormatroyd—but a very changed Sheba Ormatroyd from the one who had fled away in the secrecy of night to the care and protection of a man of whom

she knew indeed very little; but for whom she had a love boundless as her trust, and faith, and passionate devotion.

The change was such a change as only shows itself in a face that is the mirror of the soul, and Sheba's soul had, as it were, rushed into life and feeling and knowledge, with one bound.

Freedom had come to her; love had come to her; the gifts of the tree of knowledge had come to her; and all that had been crushed and hidden and subdued so long, seemed to have burst forth into a magnificent vitality that gave her the grandest dower of womanhood—peace of mind, and beauty of soul. Presently a step made her turn round, on her face that flush and glow of welcome that only comes with the advent of what is beloved.

"It is you, Paul, at last. I thought I saw you coming. What have you done with Müller?"

"I left him talking to Black Joe. One of their usual arguments."

The girl laughed—a bright happy laugh that had the true ring of mirth in it. She still busied herself preparing the table, but the flush on her cheek betrayed consciousness, and there was a little nervous tremor about the busy hands.

He watched her silently; then, as if obeying some mastering impulse, he suddenly approached and drew her to his side and looked down into her eyes with a long, eager, passionate look—the look of one who rather asks for assurance of love, than acknowledges its certainty.

"Oh! my dearest," he murmured, and stooped and touched her lips eagerly and yet with a certain fear that seemed to chill the caress.

She clung to him for a moment in a silent half-pathetic way. "What is it, Paul?" she asked timidly. "Nothing has happened? . . . No fresh trouble?"

"No," he said and gently stroked the thick dark hair from her brow. "Nothing fresh. I should think," and he laughed bitterly, "that fate had about done her worst for us. There could hardly be anything else to happen, after——"

"Oh, hush," she interrupted, and raised her head from his shoulder, and stood facing him with the warm colour flushing her soft cheeks. "Have we not agreed to forget that? Why should it trouble you? . . ."

"It does trouble me," he said gravely. "How could it be otherwise? Night and day I think of it. God knows I would sooner have forfeited my own life than done you wrong . . . and now look what I have made of yours."

"Oh, Paul—Paul!" she cried brokenly. "Have I not told you again and again that to be near you, within sight of your face and sound of your voice, is enough for my happiness? . . . I would not go back to the old misery, the old dumb, repressed, cheerless life, not for all the wealth and honour the world could give. And

after all," she added softly, "it was not your fault. I will never allow that."

"No," he said with a heavy sigh, "not my fault that the dead returned—but mine that has placed you in such a position; not mine that I love you and that you love me, and yet . . . we scarcely dare to speak of it."

"What matters that?" she said lifting those great glorious eyes to his own. "We know it—we *feel* it. It is as the air we breathe—the light of our days. It is about us and around us . . . that is enough—for me," she added very low.

He drew her to him once again with a reverent and hesitating grace. . . . "Oh," he said softly, "how generous women are when they love; and how little men deserve that they should be. . . . If I had but known you sooner . . . if the past could be undone——"

Her colour changed, she trembled from head to foot. "It cannot," she said brokenly. "When you came to me that night . . . and told me the story of your life . . . and how, as if in very mockery, that face had crossed your path again, and that it was not possible to fulfil your promise until you were sure you were free . . . as you had believed . . . I told you I was perfectly content to trust you and—wait. But nothing could have induced me to go home—to such a home. That last piece of treachery, the cruel trick that was to decoy me into that man's loathsome arms, was the finishing stroke to all I had borne so long. I would have begged my bread sooner than owe food or shelter to them, ever again. I told you so . . . And then Müller came forward and said he would be my father and protector, and so I took the old place, dear Paul, and became your child's teacher once more; and we have been very happy and merry over our new relationship, and so we might always be, it seems to me, for I want nothing on earth save to know you love me, and to feel you are near me."

"Because," he said, "you are but a girl, and innocent and pure, and easily content, and I verily believe you care nothing for the world, or what it would say or think."

"The world," she laughed gaily. "Fancy the world and—Sheba Ormatroyd! How incongruous. It is not even aware of her existence."

"Still," he insisted, "when you gain more wisdom you may blame me, and then—well, then I should kill myself, I think, for I could never bear to hear you reproach me, Sheba. God knows I **am** no coward, but to think I have such a life as yours to answer for—to see its gifts and treasures thrown at my feet, and yet to **feel** that I am making such base use of them. . . ."

"Paul," she cried, "you will break my heart if you speak so. Listen to me. Perhaps you don't understand how I love you—how I feel that to you I owe every joy I have ever known. It

is not easy for me to express myself and words seem poor and weak when one wants them to say what is in one's very soul—one's whole life and being. *Nothing* you could do would seem to me wrong . . . how could it? That you love me is as wonderful to me now as it was the first hour I heard it, and that fact alone is enough. . . . I care for nothing else. . . ."

"But you will," he said, "some day . . . and then you will say I did you a great wrong——"

"Never," she said solemnly as she lifted her eyes to his. "I am safe—at rest—happy. True, as Müller says, it is not always easy to act brother and sister, but save for some chance outbreak . . . like . . . like this, Paul, we have done it very successfully. It is understood that we love each other . . . it is also understood that as soon as freedom comes to you, I am ready to be your wife. Till then I do not find it hard to live our free, careless Bohemian life. These past months have held for me perfect unclouded happiness."

"And so," he said passionately, "they have for me. Still, Sheba, you do not understand that sometimes it is hard. A man's love is not like a woman's."

"I suppose," she said sadly, "I do not content you as you do me."

"Perhaps," he said, softly kissing her eyes, "you content me so much that I become—discontented. Forgive me, dear; I have no right to say so much. It was not in our agreement, was it? But for a whole week I have not had a word with you alone, not a kiss—not anything to satisfy my restless heart, save some shy fleeting look from those glorious eyes. How I love your eyes, Sheba!"

"Do you?" she said laughing, yet crimsoning beneath his gaze. "I am glad of it—glad and proud that thy hand-maiden has found grace in thy sight, my lord."

"Don't," he whispered passionately; "you must not be humble to me—the colder, the prouder, the better."

"And yet," she said, "just now you seemed to blame me because I was—distant."

"Well," he said half laughing, "a week is too long, and Müller is a veritable watch-dog. I wonder how he came to spare us this *tête-à-tête* to-day. Probably he thought you were having a siesta like Paul."

"It was too hot to sleep," she said, "so I came out here."

"I am thankful for that small mercy," he said, smiling down at her. "Oh, Sheba, Sheba, what blushes are those. Tell me again you are happy."

"You are insatiable, Paul," she said, drawing herself away from his eager arms. "I have told you enough for one day—too much—and yet why should I fear to tell it you again? I might as well deny I breathe, as that I love you——"

"Darling," he cried, "it is more than I deserve, God knows!"

"And—loving you," she went on, her eyes kindling and the brilliant colour glowing in either cheek, "has made me, I think, in love with life. I am no more myself. I am never alone, never unhappy. I have learned there is something worth living for—dying for—the one great and glorious gift Heaven gives to earth and has given to me—to love, and be beloved."

Then suddenly she paused, as if ashamed. "I say too much," she cried, and trembled and turned away because there was that in his face which frightened her for the self-control that had always been between them as yet, and because she had begun dimly to understand that love to a man has less of the divine and more of the mortal in its nature, than ever it has to a woman. He was still a god to her, and she worshipped him as such, but she to him held all that was beautiful and accessible even amidst her divinity. Therein lay the danger that as yet neither would acknowledge, but that made itself felt in moments such as these.

Sheba's position was indeed a critical and a strange one. When Bessie Saxton had told her of the proposed plan to force her into compliance with her mother's desires, she had felt such loathing and horror as made her almost desperate. Then and there she had decided upon leaving home as Meredith had entreated her to do, and with Bessie's help it had been easily managed.

It was when they had arrived at Brisbane, that Paul found his plans were destined to be overthrown. He sang with his usual success to a crowded house and an enthusiastic audience. Sheba was not present, being too fatigued with the long journey. At the close of the opera a bouquet was thrown to him from a side box. He picked it up and glanced at the place from which it had come. One glance—that was all—but it turned his life to tragedy. It sent him sick and reeling to his dressing-room like one seized with a mortal illness. It told him that the woman who had been his life's evil genius, who had deserted and betrayed him and her child, and had left him for dead while she fled with her low-born paramour—that this woman, his wife still since the law had bound them and had yet to dis sever those bonds, was alive and well, and to all appearance in the enjoyment of affluence and luxury. The shock was all the more terrible in that it was so utterly unexpected.

And yet is it not always "the unexpected that happens?" It was only a very old story repeated. A young man's mad folly and its consequences; having their resurrection just as he had begun to assure himself they were for ever dead and buried.

He had quarrelled with his father on this girl's account; had married her and brought her out to the colonies in the full confidence of finding wealth and fortune. And this was the end. The woman had wearied of the struggle for riches, and had fled from her husband with a gold-digger whom fortune had lavishly favoured.

He had followed them from place to place, partly with the brute instinct of vengeance, partly with the resolve of getting back the child. He had found her at last; there had been a desperate quarrel, and she had drawn her pistol and deliberately shot him and left him for dead. From that time he heard nothing of her until one night in the Sydney streets he came across the drunken ruffian who had been her companion. The man, who was in the last stage of *delirium tremens*, had been just picked up out of the harbour, where he had thrown himself, under the impression that his clothes were on fire. They were taking him to the hospital when Meredith saw and recognized him. He died at noon next day, confessing to Paul, who sat beside him, that his guilty wife was also dead, having been drowned in a boating accident two years before on the Murray River.

Paul believed the story, which indeed seemed authentic enough and was verified by newspaper accounts, as well as the oath of a dying man. Perhaps the man believed it also. It was too late to determine that now, but Meredith only learnt its falsity when too late to repair the wrong he had all unconsciously wrought on another innocent life.

In utter desperation he took what seemed to him the best and only course. He confessed the whole miserable story to Sheba herself, without extenuation or plea of any sort. He fully expected she would at once leave him and go back to her parents, perhaps even in time marry the hated and objectionable Pharamond. But no such thought crossed the girl's mind.

She was too utterly unconventional to regard the matter as one more worldly and experienced would have regarded it. She saw in Paul Meredith a victim, not an offender; and she was young and pure, and strong, and brave, and she loved him with all her great ardent soul. That love seemed to give her a right to be near him, to comfort him when he needed comfort, to strengthen him when he was weak and unhappy.

"I will not leave you," she had said when he had told her all, and told her too that now the choice must rest with herself, until such time as he could free himself from the dishonouring entanglement that still held him. "I will be your sister . . . and Müller shall still be my father. I am not afraid, Paul. The world is nothing to me—and its opinions less. I love you and I can trust you, and there is no one else in all the wide earth to whom I can say those words."

Then he had knelt at her feet, as one kneels to a saint, and the tears had rushed to his eyes as brokenly and feebly he tried to thank her.

"As there is a God above," he murmured below his breath, "you shall never repent that trust."

So it had come to pass that they were all staying for a brief summer holiday in this wild bush nook. No one had asked any

questions as to the relationship between the young girl and the two men, it being generally supposed that Sheba was the daughter of the old German, and Paul a relation of both.

They were essentially a very happy quartet. Müller was devoted to the girl, and she expanded mentally and physically under the genial influence, the sheltering love, and universal content and peacefulness of that home atmosphere. The child adored her, and the consciousness of Paul's love was like perpetual sunshine. But Paul himself was not happy, and gradually she began to perceive it. He was restless, gloomy, absent; and at times she grew fearful as to whether his love for her was the deep absorbing thing that she had imagined.

In that doubt she wronged him. He loved her as he had never thought it was in him to love woman again after that one terrible lesson; but he knew that the less he spoke of, or betrayed that love, the better it would be for both their sakes. He had schooled himself to be her brother and comrade; it was only now and then that the fire would burst forth, and he would become lover as well.

Müller watched them with argus eyes, having indeed formed so strong and deep an attachment to the girl that he began to regard her as his own daughter. He knew well enough the peril in which they both stood—that conventionalities were apt to be irksome—that their sips of companionship created but a fiercer thirst—that to be young, passionate and beloved was an exquisite happiness, but yet an imminent danger.

And there were times, when watching them both, and noting only too clearly how the mere presence or contact of either was enough to transfigure the simplest phase of their daily lives, he would ask himself—half fearful of a reply he dared not give—“How will it end?”

(To be continued.)

A LADY NOVELIST.

BY DENZIL VANE,

AUTHOR OF “FROM THE DEAD,” “LIKE LUCIFER,” ETC.

LADY ARAMINTA FITZAZURE was secretly dissatisfied with her position in society. She burned for a wider renown than that of being a mere woman of fashion, who gave the most delightful garden-parties and the most epicurean little dinners in London.

“Now-a-days one must really do something or be something out of the common to be a real social success—that is, to be raised above the common herd,” she said plaintively to her great ally, pretty Mrs. Jonquil.

Mrs. Jonquil's set was not quite so exclusive as that of Lady Araminta, but the latter found her chosen ally very useful sometimes. Mrs. Jonquil's acquaintance among literary and artistic people was large and varied—she even prided herself on a certain Bohemian flavouring in her gatherings at her charming house in South Kensington.

Whenever Lady Araminta wished to secure a "celebrity" to play the part of lion and roar gently for the delectation and amusement of her own particular clique, Mrs. Jonquil could generally secure the coveted personage. In a word, Mrs. Jonquil was a sort of social jackal to her more aristocratic friend; and to her, therefore, Lady Araminta had recourse in her present trouble.

"Be a little more explicit, dear," said the jackal sweetly. "Just explain exactly what you want to do, and then perhaps I may be able to help you."

"The fact is I have no definite idea what I do wish; but I am tired of my present prosaic existence."

"What an *enfant gâté* you are! Surely you are not discontented with life?" said Mrs. Jonquil, with a touch of irony too fine for the other to see. The jackal was a trifle jealous of the lion's superior social status and rather more than a trifle pleased to hear that even a lady in her own right is sometimes dissatisfied with her lot.

"But indeed I am," cried her ladyship dolefully. "I want excitement."

"Go to Monte Carlo," said the other concisely.

"I have tried that; but I lost a lot of money, and, in short, I found that form of excitement unsatisfactory—and expensive."

"Try roughing it abroad—of course not in places where you are likely to meet your friends."

"Where do I escape them?" said her ladyship sighing. "People go everywhere now-a-days. Besides, I don't like roughing it; I like my comforts," she added, glancing round at the luxurious furnishing of her boudoir.

"Wait a minute, and let me think," said the jackal, wrinkling her pretty white forehead.

After a brief period of reflection, she looked up quickly and said, "Write a novel!"

Lady Araminta started, but did not rebuff this suggestion as she had the other two.

"It would give me a great deal of trouble," she said dubiously.

"But then think of the excitement of seeing yourself in print, and of being cut up in the *Rhadamanthine*."

"I don't see the fun of that," put in Lady Araminta, tossing her head.

"Don't you? Well, that is just what I should enjoy—it must be the *sauce piquante* of authorship."

"But think of the trouble of writing a novel."

Mrs. Jonquil bent forward and fixed her bright eyes on her friend.

"That is easily obviated," she said mysteriously. "Keep a secretary, and make him write it. Why should you work yourself if you have money to pay some one else to do it for you? *Pas si bête*," added Mrs. Jonquil, shrugging her shoulders. She was fond of airing her French, which was excellent.

"That is not such a bad idea—particularly if the secretary were nice."

"I know a really charming man, young, good-looking, clever and amusing—the very person to write a society novel."

"Then why in the world hasn't he written one and made himself famous?"

"Not clever enough for that, and too poor. While the grass was growing the horse would be starving, and that sort of thing, you know. But if you, dear Araminta, paid him two or three guineas a week to come here and write from dictation, he would be delighted. I dare say he would help you with the grammar and any little trick of writing you might not know of, plot and incidents and dialogue, and so on. You would be doing a charitable action and amusing yourself at the same time. The book, too, would certainly be a success; middle-class people would be enthusiastic about it—a novel by a lady of title affords them a sort of vicarious way of mixing in Society, with a capital S, you know."

"Well, I'll think about it," said Lady Araminta thoughtfully. "It would certainly be very nice to win fame as an author; and the secretary idea is not so bad."

Mrs. Jonquil's handsome eyes were fixed on the other's face, with a look half of contempt, half of satire.

"Have luncheon with me to-morrow, dear," she said rising. "Your literary Mentor that-is-to-be shall be there to meet you."

The next day Lady Araminta drove to Mrs. Jonquil's house in very good spirits. The idea of appearing before the public in the character of an author had many attractions for her. It would raise her above the level of the ordinary run of ladies of fashion; it would give her not only social prestige as a clever and accomplished woman, but would bring her a certain sort of celebrity outside her own circle. The latter thought was so pleasing to her that she resolved to carry out Mrs. Jonquil's suggestion without delay, if the proposed secretary were at all presentable.

In Mrs. Jonquil's drawing-room was only one other guest, a tall, handsome young man, well-dressed and well-mannered, whom the hostess introduced as "Mr. Marpenn." Could this be the impetuous scribbler of whom Mrs. Jonquil had spoken? At luncheon nothing was said on the all-important subject; Mr. Marpenn talked well on all sorts of topics, and seemed thoroughly *au courant* with the doings of the great world. But later, when the trio had adjourned to Mrs. Jonquil's morning-room, the whole thing was satisfactorily arranged. Mr. Marpenn was engaged by

her ladyship as her private secretary at a salary of three guineas a week, with the promise of a handsome honorarium if the projected novel proved a success.

* * * * *

Lady Araminta's husband had been a Manchester cotton-spinner, but at the time of his marriage had severed all connection with the paternal business. He had the greatest regard for his aristocratic wife and her large assortment of relations; but he was determined to be always master in his own house. Naturally he did not approve of the appointment of a young and handsome man as his wife's private secretary. When her ladyship informed him that her literary work rendered such a functionary a necessity, he asked crossly why she wasted her time on such stuff? Weren't there novels enough and to spare without hers, and if she must indulge a taste for that sort of thing, what did she want a secretary for—why didn't she do the work herself?

To these and many other questions Lady Araminta replied sweetly though firmly that Mr. Marpenn's assistance was indispensable, but that when the novel was safely through the press he should be dismissed. When the Fitzazures left town for Scotland the private secretary accompanied them; later on, in the autumn, he was domiciled at Fitzazure Abbey, and in the intervals of literary work enjoyed some excellent shooting. The novel did not progress very rapidly, for Mr. Marpenn thoroughly appreciated the luxury of his new quarters; and Lady Araminta found her secretary a most useful right-hand man—he filled the rôle of tame-cat to admiration; he helped her get up theatricals and *tableaux*, and was always ready to fetch and carry for her. Some of the strait-laced county people shrugged their shoulders and muttered something about a *cavalier servente*; but the more good-natured supposed it was all right "as Fitzazure didn't seem to mind."

At last Lady Araminta herself awoke to the fact that people were talking about her. Having always kept herself clear of scandal, and honestly hating notoriety of that sort, she began to hurry the dilatory Marpenn through his task, and early in the spring the novel was completed and in the publisher's hands.

But like Sindbad's old man of the sea, Mr. Marpenn was not easily to be got rid of. He reminded her ladyship that the book must be seen through the press—"proof-sheet correcting was most anxious and monotonous work; he was quite sure Lady Araminta would not like that part of authorship."

With a sigh Lady Araminta consented to the secretary's continued residence in Eaton Place. Her husband grumbled and told her plainly that he would no longer tolerate Mr. Marpenn's presence there. Something very like a serious quarrel between this hitherto model couple was the result. Lady Araminta obstinately stood her ground and in the end carried her point—adding

as a concession that her secretary should dine in the library in future.

At last the proof-sheets of the novel were corrected ; the novel went to press, and the secretary's labours being concluded he took his departure from Eaton Place. But somehow the inextinguishable Marpenn was always dropping in on all sorts of pretexts. Having once allowed him to establish himself on the footing of a friend, it was really impossible for Lady Araminta to dismiss him like a servant.

When the novel was published, the pseudo-authoress was so delighted that she forgot all her vexations. With one or two exceptions the reviews were favourable, and Mr. Marpenn heard, with secret amusement, loud praise lavished on "dear Lady Araminta's clever book." The loudest in this chorus of adulation was a certain critic who had been particularly censorious in his judgment of a book written by the secretary during the previous year and published under a *nom-de-plume*.

"Give you my word, sir," he said to Marpenn at dinner one night at Mrs. Jonquil's ; "Lady Araminta's book shows really remarkable talent, great insight into character, elegant writing and—and knowledge of society. A brilliant work—really a brilliant work."

Marpenn smiled and said he thought it was.

At all events, whatever its merits or demerits, the book had a large sale, and a second edition was issued. The handsome honorarium promised by Lady Araminta was duly bestowed on the secretary, "and now," thought her ladyship, "surely I am done with him."

But Mr. Marpenn was not to be so easily "done with."

"No, my lady," he said to himself with a disagreeable smile after an attempt at a snub on Lady Araminta's part, "you have had your triumph and you shall pay for it. Why should you derive not only praise but pecuniary benefit from my work ? You will not find me very easy to shake off."

Then he began a systematic course of levying black-mail on the luckless lady novelist, and cheques—for much larger amounts than those received by Lady Araminta from her publishers—were frequently made payable to Herbert Marpenn. Mr. Fitzazure was at last made aware of the persecution and extortion to which his wife was being subjected.

"Araminta ! it is really time we should arrive at an understanding," he said one day, coming into her boudoir with an open letter in his hand, "if things have come to such a pass that some confounded scoundrel thinks it necessary to write me an anonymous letter——"

"An anonymous letter !" echoed Lady Araminta feebly. "Oh, Tom ! surely not about—me ?"

"Well, read it for yourself and see," said the angry husband,

thrusting it into her hand. "Mind, I don't say I believe a word of it, but it isn't a pleasant thing for a man to hear about his wife."

"Oh, Tom!" cried her ladyship with flaming cheeks, when she had glanced hurriedly through the letter, "it is shameful—and all untrue, I swear to you!" And she burst into tears.

"I told you I didn't believe it," repeated Mr. Fitzazure, "but as I say, it is not pleasant to be told that your wife has been seen at Richmond, dining at the 'Stars and Stripes' with a wretched literary hack——"

"I will never see him again," sobbed her ladyship. "Oh, Tom! you can't think what misery that man has caused me!"

"But, my dear, why in the world——"

"Why has he a hold over me?" she interrupted passionately. "I will confess everything to you, if you will promise to forgive me for my deceit——"

Poor Mr. Fitzazure's ruddy face turned ghastly white. He had always believed so thoroughly in his wife, and their married life had been far happier than the majority. Yet her words would bear a very ugly interpretation.

"Araminta," he said sternly, "whatever you have to confess, don't keep me in suspense; tell me the worst at once."

"I—I did not write my novel," said her ladyship in a very small voice.

Mr. Fitzazure's brow cleared and he heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Oh! Is that all!" he said passing his hand across his forehead. "Then who did?"

"Mr. Marpenn," faltered Lady Araminta; "he wrote every word of it."

Mr. Fitzazure burst into a loud laugh. "Upon my word, my dear, you have made a great fool of yourself."

Then after a moment's thought he added, "And I suppose that rascal Marpenn has been frightening you into giving him bribes to hold his tongue?"

"Yes."

"And, what is worse, has placed you in a very awkward position—compromised you, in short."

"Oh no, Tom, I don't think it is as bad as that. I have been very foolish, but——"

"Well, people will talk, you know, Araminta; but I'll soon put an end to their confounded cackle."

Just then the door opened and the subject of their conversation entered the room unannounced—Mr. Marpenn had of late assumed all the privileges of a favoured intimate.

The secretary looked somewhat disconcerted by Mr. Fitzazure's presence. But his native impudence soon returned.

"Good morning, Lady Araminta," he said airily. "I wanted to speak to you in private for a moment—about your novel," he

added as he read signs of cold displeasure and half-veiled contempt in her face.

"Whatever you have to say to Lady Araminta can be said in my presence," said Mr. Fitzazure stiffly; "we have no secrets from each other."

"Indeed!" sneered Marpenn glancing stealthily at his patroness. "Not even on the subject of her ladyship's book?"

"No, sir; not even on that subject. If you can frighten a lady into giving you money and into enduring your society you will find that *I* am not easily intimidated," said Mr. Fitzazure with dignity.

"Indeed!" remarked the secretary with a sardonic smile, "then I presume that her ladyship is prepared to avow the real author of her very successful book."

"Oh no, Tom," put in Lady Araminta in a frightened whisper. "Don't let him do that, I should die of the ridicule."

"Pshaw! Who would believe him?" interrupted her husband contemptuously.

"There I think you are mistaken," returned the secretary suavely. "I have several notes written by her ladyship in which she refers to the book as my work."

"Is this true?" asked Mr. Fitzazure of his wife.

"I—am afraid so," she answered tearfully.

"Then," he added turning to Mr. Marpenn, who stood watching the pair with a well-assumed air of invincibility, "I suppose there is but one way out of this dilemma. Name your price, sir."

The secretary named it, and the amount might well stagger even a man of Tom Fitzazure's wealth. At first he obstinately refused to submit to the shameless extortion, but when his wife whispered to him: "Pay it, Tom, and I will promise to do without a single new dress for a year; and we won't come up to town next season. I will make any sacrifice rather than face the exposure he threatens," Mr. Fitzazure produced his cheque-book and reluctantly signed a draft for the amount named, which the secretary pocketed. He then bowed gracefully to Lady Araminta and, having successfully traded on a woman's weakness and foolish vanity and the generosity of a too-indulgent husband, left the room and the house.

* * * * *

In spite of Mr. Fitzazure's hush-money some reports of the real authorship of Lady Araminta's novel got about, but they were not generally believed and to this day her ladyship gets a fair amount of *kudos* for her "literary talents."

But if people ask her, as they not infrequently do, when she is going to publish a new novel, Lady Araminta shakes her head and smiles.

For only Mr. Fitzazure and Mr. Marpenn know what was the cost of Lady Araminta's first—and last novel.

LONDON LETTERS,

TO VARIOUS COUNTRY COUSINS.

No. II.

DEAR COUSINS,

You have no idea how refreshing a thing, amid all the bustle and practicality of a busy season, was Professor Herkomer's "pictorial music play," performed at his little theatre at Bushey the other day. It is called "An Idyl," and it is well named. Some of us seek vainly for the idyllic and the Arcadian in this work-a-day world, and such glimpses of it as we gain are subjects for gratitude. I wonder if you, living in the country, would have appreciated the pictures of pastoral life that the professor gave us, as much as we did, who have been so long "in the great city pent." Herkomer's mind is a poetic one, as shown in his arrangement of the picturesque scenes, his wonderful effects of sunshine and moonlight and firelight, and the whole idea of the play. You have seen it detailed in all the papers, so I need not particularize its beauties here. The graceful lyrics from Mr. Joseph Bennett's pen have been beautifully set to music. Miss Dorothy Dene looked delightful as the village maiden, and Professor Herkomer was an ideal blacksmith of the dramatic sort. I wish you could have seen and enjoyed the play, as we did.

But you must not imagine that we who live in London have no refreshing sights and sounds wherewith to beguile ourselves in the turmoil of the season. The picture galleries are at their best just now, and every one prefers the New Gallery to the Royal Academy, except the benighted Philistines who come up from the country with the rust of twenty years or so upon their minds. Do not think I am making any personal reference. *You* are among those who can live away from cities without becoming dowdy in either mind or dress. It is not always so, as you are aware; and I was immensely amused the other day at hearing a clergyman's wife call the pictures at the New Gallery "transcendent and negligent of creed." Was it not too funny? She could hardly accuse Mr. Edward Kennard's water-colour drawings now exhibited at Messrs. Reynolds' Fine Art Gallery in St. James' Street, of any "negligence of creed." The love and worship of sport have been their inspiration, and a strong one, too, to judge by bold touches and vivid effects in which the drawings abound. They illustrate incidents in the capture of fish, flesh and fowl, with all the modern improvements of hammerless guns, split cane rods, and repeating

rifles. The exhibition might have been called "Sport up to Date," and you who career like very amazons after the miserable fox, would thoroughly appreciate the collection, could you but see it. Mr. Kennard's skill in handling rod, gun and rifle, as well as the brush, gives his pictures that accuracy which is the handmaid of art. There is a great demand for facsimiles of them, painted by hand. Peter has ordered a dozen for the decoration of his study, and they are promised in ten days. What a delightful time he will spend in hanging them! He is a carpenter spoilt.

Our great excitement this month was the wedding of the Duke of Portland and Miss Dallas-Yorke. The interest about it was quite abnormal, and greatly puzzled the bride, who remarked to the Vicar of St. Peter's that she could not think what all the fuss was about. She was mobbed in the Park and stared at at the opera, just as Mrs. Langtry used to be, ages and ages ago. We were lucky enough to get tickets for the church, and we *did* enjoy ourselves. The centre aisle was full of duchesses, countesses, marchionesses, dukes, earls, marquises, barons, viscountesses, and well-known commoners, whose names (*some* of them) are as much honoured as any duke's. The handsome toilettes were legion; but, alas! before our eager eyes could take in the detail of one lovely costume, it was obliterated by another. I retain a sufficient recollection of them *en masse*, however, to be able to tell you that printed foulards are *the* gowns of the present season; that waists are worn longer than ever, notwithstanding the Empire bodices; and that bonnets are getting smaller and smaller. One worn by a very handsome woman consisted of a yellow rose, a rosebud, and a bit of brown ribbon striped with gauze. The Marchioness of Granby looked delicately and spiritually lovely in her white dress. She is in mourning for her father, but wore one of the bride's favourite Malmaison carnations pinned in her bonnet and another on her bodice. A lovely girl was all in white, with the exception of a sleeveless bodice of russet velvet, which fitted tightly at the back, but turned back in front with revers that were lined with white watered silk. A jabot of white silk muslin, trimmed with frills, filled in the intervening space.

The bride is a lovely girl, of a style so uncommon that all the other beauties may hide their diminished heads. She is at least an inch taller than her husband, whose stature is about five foot ten. She has a short waist and long limbs, which, as you probably know, is considered a great beauty. Her colouring is considered by many to be her strongest point, though her features are regular enough; dark brown hair with gleams of the brightest, sunniest auburn is not very common, is it? Such is the duchess's, which she wears coiled upwards in a simple fashion that no barber's art could equal. Her eyes are of the deepest violet blue, and very large and soft. With these go a complexion that has all the delicate transparence of a blonde with the vivid softness and the

dark eyebrows of the brunette. These ingredients *ought* to make a lovely girl, ought they not? And I assure you that they do.

The novel idea of decorating the chancel with two young green trees in full leaf which formed an arch, proved distinctly successful. Behind were groups of white flowers and, the gas being lighted, all their snowy brightness came out in full relief. It was the prettiest wedding I ever saw, for though Lady William Nevill's, at the Oratory, was more beautiful in its floral decorations, the crowd of shabbily-dressed on-lookers who filled half the aisle, quite spoiled the effect, so many of their gowns and bonnets being black. At St. Peter's, every one was in brilliant toilets, even the crowds in the galleries wearing bright, soft tints and the floweriest of hats and bonnets.

Both bride and bridegroom looked blithely happy as they came down the aisle. The duke even seemed to be trying not to look too happy.

Her trousseau had some lovely gowns in it, and a delicious habit from Busvine, the great hierarch of cloth, so far as riding gear is concerned. His patent safety habit has saved many a life and, what in one sense is almost worse, hideous disfigurement. A tea gown in softest white crêpe de Chine draped à la Grecque over white veiling, is one of those poetic garments that only the beautiful among women ought to be permitted to wear.

I do love pretty clothes, and I am sure you do too, or you would not be so nice as you are, cousins.

I had the good fortune to see some delicious gowns that Vignon, of the Rue de Rivoli, who has dressed the French Royalties for many years, has made for the Duchesse de Chartres. One was a most lovely white crêpe de Chine dinner dress, richly embroidered in gold and silver, metal threads raised upon the milky surface of the crêpe. The style is Empire. Round the edge of the skirt is a wide band of the raised embroidery, measuring sixteen inches in depth, the effect of which I have never seen surpassed, to say nothing of the lovely folds into which the weight of it draws the crêpe. The bodice is cut low and the long sleeves are à la Juive.

Another, also a dinner gown, is in a very beautiful shade of buttercup yellow brocade. The train forms a *manteau de cour*. The low bodice is trimmed with a gold embroidery, and has a wide sash tied in front and falling to the edge of the dress. Another lovely dress is broché, with pale pink primulas and foliage upon a ground of moonlight blue; the skirt opens over a petticoat of pale pink satin veiled with costly old lace, its whiteness mellowed to a lovely tint by time. Two little walking dresses are in printed foulard, and a robe de chambre (which we should call a tea gown) is in brocaded oriental material, exactly like a cashmere shawl, only all silk, opening over pale pink crêpe de Chine. The wide, long sleeves are lined with pink, and a sash of pink silk falls over the underdress and ends in silver tassels.

C. E. H.

LONDON SOCIETY.

AUGUST, 1889.

A NEW OTHELLO.

A NOVEL.

By IZA DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE, HONOUR AND OBEDY," "NOT EASILY JEALOUS," "ONLY A LOVE STORY,"
"LOVE IN IDLENESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO WOMEN'S HEARTS.

"Lovely and lonely seeming,
Hast thou no sorrow for speaking?
Hast thou no dream to seek?"

IT is Mrs. Percival's day at home, and the parlourmaid is kept busy answering the bell as the usual sprinkling of visitors come and go—not as sorrows do, in battalions, but in a thin stream scattered over the afternoon, like the intermittent drops of a summer shower; some paying the brief duty call, with waiting carriage and impatient horses, others settling down for a long chat and lingering sociably over their tea and cake.

Amongst the long stayers are Dr. Fitzallan and his fair wife. For Ray has got his wish—he generally does when his mother can give it to him—and Mrs. Fitzallan is here. It is her first visit, and Ray observes with secret satisfaction that she has made a favourable impression. Her bonnet is charming; *he* regards the bonnet only as a becoming setting to the face beneath it; but the women of the family appreciate it *as* a bonnet. Her dress is unexceptional; it seems to be moulded to her tall, graceful, willowy figure as if dress and wearer were one; its colour is one of these soft half-tints that are neither blue nor green nor grey, but a blending of all three, becoming only to a complexion as clear and pure as hers. Her manners have that repose whose stamp is not always strictly limited to the caste of Vere De Vere. A trifle too much repose for some tastes; her calmness seems to border on

coldness; but there is an unaffected and pleasing, although reserved, tone about her—a dreamy sweetness in the serenity of her deep grey eyes—an attractive mingling of pride and gentleness in her general expression.

Mrs. Percival's face is one which those who run may read; and Ray reads in his mother's kindly smile that *she* has satisfactorily "taken to" Mrs. Fitzallan. Rhoda's prepossession is equally evident, though it is uncertain whether it is the dress or the wearer that interests her most. While her eyes are fixed in candid admiration on the visitor, she is mentally deciding that she will have her *eau-de-Nil* skirt draped in the style of Mrs. Fitzallan's, if she can only remember exactly how it is done. Soon after introduction she informs Mrs. Fitzallan frankly:

"Ray—that's my brother, you know—has told us a lot about you. We've all been wanting to see you," and settles herself, with the clear intention of making friends, on one side of the new acquaintance; Eileen—also interested, and anxious to cultivate her doctor's wife—having already taken up a similar position on the other.

Mrs. Fitzallan chats kindly and pleasantly with the two girls, giving the larger share of her attention to Eileen, on whom, as her husband's patient, she naturally looks with interest. Mrs. Fitzallan talks more to women than to men. She makes herself very pleasant in her quiet way to her own sex, as Mrs. Percival notes with approbation. She sympathizes with one infirm old lady about her asthma, and gives another a recipe for a lotion to rub on her rheumatic joints. She talks about the nursery with a young matron, favours her with some advice as to the treatment of the convalescent stage of measles, and promises her a pattern of a pinafore.

Ray, who generally only vouchsafes to show himself for half-an-hour or so on his mother's "afternoons," and often shirks putting in an appearance at all on those mildly festive occasions, is to-day amiable enough to favour them with his society from first to last. He makes himself unusually useful, takes an active share in the labours of the tea-table, fetches and carries cups and plates for the old ladies, and pays proper but in no way noticeable attention to Mrs. Fitzallan, until late in the afternoon, the old ladies having departed, he feels his duty done, and that it is full time for him to reap his reward, and accordingly he takes up his position by Mrs. Fitzallan's side.

Ray has habitually got plenty to say to women he does not care a straw about—trivial talk no more rapid, compliments no more idle, than the general small change which passes current among his class and kind for drawing-room conversation. But to Mrs. Fitzallan he can hit on nothing to say—or rather he could say too much. He wants to tell her of his pleasure at seeing her in his own home—at the prospect of her being friends with his own

people—at the development of their travelling acquaintance into the promise of a family friendship. He wants to express all this, but he says not a word of it; only his dark eyes express it eloquently enough as they dwell with frank, pure pleasure and admiration on her face.

Ray's eyes are the best of his generally prepossessing features; his mother is as proud of them as if no young man ever had big brown eyes before. But they do not seem to produce any more impression on Mrs. Fitzallan than if they had been the smallest and greenest of gooseberry orbs.

By way of opening up a promising subject, he asks her if she has read a book that everybody is reading. To this question she replies with a quiet smile:

"Seven!"

"Seven?" he echoes, puzzled.

"You are the seventh person who has asked me that in the last two days."

Ray is easily shut up by Mrs. Fitzallan.

"I wish I could find something to say that you haven't heard seven, or seventeen, times before!" he observes a little huffily.

"You would have a very original mind if you could!"

"Why are you always so down on me, Mrs. Fitzallan?"

"Down on you?" she echoes, lifting her eyebrows with unfeigned surprise. "Is it being 'down on you' to remark that it would be difficult for you or any one else to find anything that has *not* been said before? The world has been going on for a good many generations, and there cannot be much that's *new* left to say—unless you have a scientific discovery to announce! But we need not turn into mutes for all that. Most remarks will bear repeating—happily."

The majority of the rest of the party are grouped in various attitudes of attention around Dr. Fitzallan. He has generally plenty to say, whether it is new or old; he is now holding forth on one of his favourite optimistic theories, and soon finds himself in full and undisputed possession of the field, for gradually even the intermittent flow of low laughing chatter between Kate and Rhoda ebbs into silence; and then Ray, perceiving, or with his wonted sensitiveness fancying he perceives, that Mrs. Fitzallan's attention appears to be wandering from him to her husband, breaks off abruptly in whatever he was saying, and turns to listen too.

Dr. Fitzallan's text is that the only true happiness is in self-forgetfulness.

"It is only by rising out of the narrow limits of self that we can reach to happiness. The mere common craving after amusement, after so-called 'distraction,' proves it to us. Music, poetry, the drama, are our resources. Why? Because they serve to distract us—help, as we say, to 'carry us out of ourselves.' Thus in our very pleasures we practically recognize the fact that mere self-

forgetfulness constitutes happiness. Thus in love we find the highest happiness, because of the most perfect abnegation of self—because the mere transference of the centre of thought and feeling from the individual self to another being is happiness in itself, because our constant aspiration and effort, conscious or unconscious, recognized or not, is to *get out of ourselves*—to forget ourselves. Thus we find our pleasure in the play, the poem, the story, which carries us away, out of the limits of our personal life, into the lives of others, even the creatures of fiction! And thus, dimly foreshadowed, even in our blind, deaf earth-life here in the flesh, is the selflessness of our ultimate destiny, when the principle we call the soul dissolves back into the element from which it was first evolved—when ‘the dewdrop slips into the shining sea!’”

“Don’t you believe in the preservation of the individuality in immortality, then?” asked Ray.

“While the word individuality has meaning for us—while the idea of conscious egoism has any attraction—so long, earth-bound in the affinities of the flesh, we are incapable of even conceiving that far-off future, when individual consciousness shall be lost in the whole—when the spark struck off from the fire of eternal life returns and merges in that from which it sprang!”

At this point his discourse is broken off by the parlourmaid’s announcing:

“Mr. Carresford.”

“My dear Geoffrey,” exclaims Mrs. Percival, hastening to welcome him with an affectionate greeting, “how late you are! I was afraid you weren’t coming—so glad you *are* here!”

Geoffrey’s appearance puts an abrupt stop to the subject that was in such full flow.

They all promptly come tumbling down from the empyrean—from the ideal to the real and practical. Geoffrey Carresford, earthly and realistic, solid and substantial flesh and blood, is in himself the concentrated antithesis of the transcendental.

“I don’t think you have met my brother before,” says Mrs. Percival, turning to Dr. Fitzallan.

“Only at the station, where I had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Carresford for a moment,” he replies with somewhat formal politeness and a coldly courteous gesture of salutation. Geoffrey returns the greeting in his more bluff and free-and-easy manner. For a moment the two men look full at each other, face to face: Geoffrey with just the faintest shade of curiosity, only half a degree removed from utter indifference; Dr. Fitzallan with an unconscious movement drawing himself up to his full height, with a touch of sternness in the fixity of his steady gaze. Was there even for a moment a flash of daring—a glance like a challenge, in his steel-blue eyes?

Only one of the party present noticed that momentary look

upon his face—his wife, who knew his every shade of expression so well.

There was no resumption of the line of conversation broken off by Geoffrey's entrance. He observed, *à propos* of the lateness of his appearance, that he had only just come up from the Rockleighs'. It occurred to his sisters and to Eileen that he had been up to visit the Rockleighs almost every day since his return, though none of them uttered this remark aloud. Mrs. Fitzallan made polite inquiries about the Rockleigh party, to which Ray added his word or two.

There was a vacant chair next to Eileen, and into this Geoffrey flung his substantial weight. She looked up and smiled at him with her usual shy, yet frank and undisguised pleasure.

"Well, Eily," he observed, "you're awake, I see? Have you been put off to sleep to-day, eh?"

"No, not to-day."

"She is looking a little tired, isn't she, Dr. Fitzallan?" said Mrs. Percival. "Would it be well, do you think, to put her to sleep now for a little while? or would it be better to-morrow?" Mrs. Percival was desirous to show off the "magnetic phenomena" before Geoffrey and Ray, yet anxious to leave Dr. Fitzallan perfectly free in the matter.

"A few minutes of the sleep would probably rest Miss Eileen more than anything else," he replied. "It is just as you—and she—may choose."

"Are there not too many present? don't you require perfect quiet?" suggested Ray.

"Oh, no, dear," exclaimed Mrs. Percival eagerly. "The first time Dr. Fitzallan mesmerized her, it was at a large party at the Houghtons', before—oh, I should think nearly a hundred people! How do you feel about it to-day, Eileen, dear?"

"Just as you like," the girl replied with her gentle confiding smile. "I think it generally does me good." She cast a glance of unconscious appeal at Geoffrey, as if asking *him* to decide.

"Well—try it," he said.

So it was decided that Dr. Fitzallan should go through the usual process before the assembled party.

He suggested that Miss Dundas should move into a comfortable easy chair; it was further off from Geoffrey, and a little apart from the rest of the company.

Her soft eyes turned again to Geoffrey with that innocent, asking, half-wistful look, as she took her seat; but she could read neither encouragement nor discouragement in his phlegmatic, impassive expression.

Dr. Fitzallan's influence as a rule subjugated the girl's senses at once; he had her so thoroughly under control that she generally sank almost instantly into the magnetic sleep at his bidding. But this day he found for the first time his influence fail him with her.

She remained awake ; no sign of the trance came over her ; only presently an uneasy look troubled her child-like face. Dr. Fitzallan hated to be thwarted ; his masterful spirit rose ; his eye kindled ; in silence he set the full force of his powerful will against this fragile creature—but in vain.

"How do you feel now ?" he demanded in a low, but compelling voice, his intent gaze fixed piercingly upon her.

She turned her little head restlessly—uneasily.

"I feel—uncomfortable," she faltered ; and her lip quivered.

Geoffrey took one quick step across the room to her side. He stood there, in Eileen's eyes,

"A tower of strength that stood four-square to all the winds that blew !"

"This sort of thing can be no good for my cousin if it makes her feel uncomfortable," he said decisively.

"Not to-day !" Mrs. Fitzallan's quiet voice broke in. "I think I would not try any more to-day, Gervas, if I were you."

She spoke calmly, but a shade entreatingly and anxiously ; she, and she only of those present, knew her husband's imperious will. But Gervas Fitzallan was a man who held himself thoroughly well in hand when he desired.

"Perhaps to-day is not a favourable occasion," he observed.

"No—of course it can't be always the same," said Mrs. Percival, eager to keep things smooth and pleasant.

Eileen's sensitive face flushed and quivered as if she were about to break down into tears. She, the innocent and unconscious, uncomprehending subject of conflicting influences, did not know what was the matter with her. Only the eyes around her seemed to hurt her ; a strange new inexplicable shyness made her feel an impulse to shrink away even from Geoffrey.

"It's a shame to play on this child's sensitive nature," he said laying his hand on her slight shoulder. "Never mind, Eily ; you shan't be teased or worried !"

Mrs. Fitzallan shot one swift anxious glance at her husband, and was reassured. His steady self-command kept his countenance calm and imperturbably unruffled. Yet she felt in the very air that there was an undefinable antagonism between those two men, under the collision of whose crossing influences that delicate little pale girl changed colour and trembled, uncomprehending ; more than that, *she* felt what no one else realized, that the antagonism was deepest, nay, was chiefly on her husband's side.

"Miss Eileen is, as you observe, of a very sensitive temperament," he said quietly, "and with such a temperament, so much depends on the mood—on the condition of the nerves. It may happen that the very process which ninety-nine times proves purely soothing, may on the hundredth occasion, on account of something abnormal in the mood, exercise a quite exceptional, disturbing influence on the nerves."

"Yes, quite so," Mrs. Percival agreed.

Mrs. Fitzallan glided quietly to Eileen's side, and laid her hand softly on the girl's head.

"Yes, that is exactly it," she said in her firm, soft, soothing tones. "Very likely she has one of those headaches coming on, that make one feel all out of sorts and unlike one's self. Now I think if she were to go and lie down quite quietly for a little while—rest is the best thing, the only panacea——"

There was nothing in the commonplace words, but her very voice, the light touch of her hand on Eileen's hair, had a strangely soothing and restful quality; and Eileen was glad to take her advice and get away out of the room.

"Yes, you're quite right, Mrs. Fitzallan," observed Mrs. Percival. "I see you understand these things."

"My wife is an excellent adviser as a rule," said the doctor; "she is one of the born nurses! The true nurse, like the poet, is born, not made."

"Yes, indeed, I am sure one had only to hear Mrs. Fitzallan talking to Mrs. Brierly of infantile diseases, and to Mrs. Lovelace of rheumatic gout, to feel sure of her having the true feminine faculty of nursing," said Mrs. Percival, delighted to catch at this opportunity of turning the subject. The girls promptly came to her assistance and kept the ball rolling; they talked of ministering angels and hospitals, and no more allusion was made to Dr. Fitzallan's failure with Eileen.

Ray had not opened his lips during this episode.

In his heart he agreed with Geoffrey; but he did not want to appear to side against the Fitzallans in any way.

The doctor and his wife presently took their leave.

Geoffrey stayed on to dinner; and when they were taking their places at table for that social meal, Mrs. Percival observed in her usual frank and kindly way:

"Let Eileen sit by Geoffrey."

She spoke and smiled genially, as if Eileen had been a child with a scratched finger, and she had been giving her a sugar-plum to comfort her. There was no secret about the sugar-plum; all the family knew very well that Eileen liked to sit by Geoffrey. It had been her treat when she was a tiny tot in pinafores; and she had been promised as a privilege, reward, or consolation to have her place beside the tall handsome lad who was then as now her hero; it had been the same thing while the child grew to girlhood; and now that she was a woman grown, and Geoffrey a big bearded man, all the family still accepted Eileen's affection for Geoffrey as just in the natural order of things.

So Eileen had the chair by Geoffrey's side reserved for her at the table; though the benefit she derived from it was limited to the mere privilege of proximity, as Geoffrey no more thought of addressing his conversation—what there was of it, and that was

not much—to her than if she had been still in pinafores. He regarded and treated her indeed almost as a child—a sister, but a favourite sister, with just that little *souppçon* of extra tenderness with which men are apt to favour their sisters by adoption over their sisters by blood. He never thought of troubling himself to make talk for Eileen, or to start any subject of discussion, as he would have done had his table neighbour been a stranger—or Lady May Rivers.

The conversation was general ; perhaps once or twice during the meal Geoffrey asked Eileen for the salt, or handed her the mustard, and once he addressed her as “little one.” This last was enough as a rule to set Eileen’s spirits in tune for the rest of the evening. But now she felt somehow that sitting next to Geoffrey was less pleasure than it used to be. There was a failing somewhere—a flaw in the old child-like content.

What had satisfied her once, satisfied her no longer. A feeling of indescribable restlessness troubled and fretted her. It seemed hard that she never—never had a word with Geoffrey alone. Always the other girls were there ; it really appeared to her that they spent the whole time running in and out of the drawing-room, so that whenever Geoffrey was there she had never the chance of a few minutes’ *tête-à-tête* with him. Or if the girls were not there, there was Momie talking to her brother ; or there was Ray ; and when Ray and Geoffrey were together they generally talked away to each other about their own affairs without taking any notice of Eileen—not in the least out of negligence or unkindness ; simply they did not suppose that Eily took any interest in the matters they were discussing. It had always been so ; there was no change, nothing new ; but somehow it was only now that she began to feel how hard it was on her to have to go shares in Geoffrey’s attention and affection with so many. She was very fond of all the family, but it did seem to her sometimes that the family was too large !

This evening her heart was full, swelled to overflowing with a tumult of mingled feelings, and she could not give them utterance. If she could only have been with Geoffrey alone for a little while, if she could have had but a few words with him, she could have told him at least a part of what she felt—have given her full heart some relief ; but she could not tell him, nor any one, how she had felt when he came to her side and took her part against the influence which he saw distressed her. When she was alone that night she lived these few minutes over and over again. How noble, how strong and splendid he had looked as he stood beside her—her hero, her protector, her guardian and shield ! How instantly he had come to her side when he fancied she was troubled and oppressed ! How safe and sheltered she always felt with him, and how gently he had spoken to her that day ! His words rang softly in her ears all night. “Never mind, Eily ; you shan’t be

teased." All night when waking she dwelt on the thought of him as he had stood beside her, like a tower of strength to guard her weakness. In sleep she dreamt those few moments over and over again, varied with the odd, unreasonable vagaries of dreams.

Eileen had never asked herself if she loved Geoffrey—her childhood's idol—otherwise than as a sister might. The very last idea that ever occurs to a young girl as innocent, simple and unworldly as Eileen, is to analyze her own affections, and classify and label the master-passion of her nature as love. She is much more likely, even certain, to label it something else. Eileen seldom dwelt in the mood introspective. She thought too much of Geoffrey to think of her own feeling for him. When she did look into her heart she found it clearly labelled as sisterly affection, and the natural hero-worship of weakness and delicacy for strength. Nor did any of the household circle regard it in any other light. Being so large and mixed a family, their number and their various relationships hindered them from attaching any special importance or significance to any one of the general family affections. There were the girls, and the boys; they had all been brought up more or less together, and as a matter of course they were all fond of each other. If there were any difference in the degrees of their fondness, Gertrude and Eileen were Geoffrey's especial adherents and adorers, Kate and Rhoda were Ray's. Once upon a time Kitty and Ray had been great allies, indeed for a season they had been inseparable; it was the season before Kate left school; then she made her *début* in society, blossomed into a beauty and a centre of attraction, and found plenty of less familiar and fraternal—and consequently more assiduous and flattering—admirers to offer incense at her shrine, while Ray's shallow boyish fancy was caught by a certain pretty Susie Spencer; and he and Kitty, always good friends, drifted as naturally back into the old simple *camaraderie* as they had begun for a short time to drift into a closer intimacy. No more was thought in the family of Eileen's affection for Geoffrey than of Kitty's frank friendship with Ray. But while Eileen herself scarcely understood her own feelings, and the companions of her daily life fathomed them still less, the Fitzallans, coming in fresh to the scene as strangers viewing the position from the outside, with naturally keen and observant eyes, unbiassed by lifelong habit, had arrived in one afternoon at a truer insight than any of the Percival family themselves.

Dr. Fitzallan went home in a silent mood. His wife knew the signs, as wives do; she knew his silence was the silence of deep irritation and annoyance, and she stifled a sigh as she thought of the quiet evening *tête-à-tête* in the twilight hour.

She was glad when he, of his own accord, broached the subject of his vexation; it was far better so than that he should brood over it.

"I have never failed before," he said frowning; "never, with any subject I had once got so completely under control. It was another influence," he added, with an indescribable vindictive resentment, "that was opposing mine to-day. Could *you* see that, Asenath?"

"Yes, I saw, or rather I felt more than saw, that another influence was over her to-day; but it may not be so another time, Gervas."

"It shall not be if I can help it. I will take care of that next time. I have seldom found a better subject than this girl. The treatment is all for her good; no one could deny the improvement in her since I have taken her in hand, and I don't mean to have her taken out of my hands by this big burly brute of a cousin."

"He does not understand," said Asenath soothingly; "as a matter of course he is doubtful about what he does not in the least comprehend, and he is anxious on her behalf."

"He had better mind his own business," said her husband roughly.

"Perhaps he thinks it *is* his business," she suggested.

He looked as if about to answer angrily; then something seemed to strike him—a new development of the idea which her remark put into his head, and he asked with evident interest and in a more placable tone:

"Is he in love with the girl, then, do you think?"

"I really know very little indeed of Mr. Carresford, and have no insight into his private feelings; but from the very little I have observed of him I should say——"

"Well?"

"I should say *not*."

"Humph," he said frowning. "He has unlimited influence over her."

"Of which I fancy he is quite unconscious. There is one thing, Gervas," she added, anxious to suggest a consolatory idea, "if Mr. Carresford is attached to his cousin and contemplates marrying her, you will have very little chance of carrying on any experiments with her; so really you should be glad if there is, as I think, nothing of the kind between them."

"Should I? How much you know and understand of the matter!" he rejoined in a sardonic tone.

"If I do not understand, it is because I do not know what there is to understand," she answered, suspecting from his expression some unexplained interest in the matter on his part. "Is there something more in all this than you have told me?"

"What do you mean?" he retorted sharply.

"Have you not some idea about these two people—some sort of interest in them? Is it that you have any previous knowledge of Mr. Carresford?"

"I? What knowledge should I have?" he replied coldly. "I never set eyes on the man in my life till the other day."

But Asenath did not place unlimited faith in this assertion. She dropped the subject, and he was willing to let it drop. He knew he could rely on Asenath's discretion, and on her loyalty. If she ever entertained the faintest idea that her husband had any associations connected with Geoffrey Carresford, she would breathe no word of her idea to any but her husband himself, possibly not even to him. It could be nothing but the faintest dream of a suspicion that had occurred to her, he knew, and he would take care that it should strike no root in her mind. It might be a little harder to deceive Asenath than the rest of the world; but it could be done, as he had good cause to know; and meanwhile, even if her curiosity were aroused, he knew how securely he could trust to her inviolable reserve.

Asenath Fitzallan lived her life to herself alone—a silent and suppressed life, folded in her inner heart, and that heart shut and locked; yet often she longed to throw open the gates to some intimate sympathy, some comprehending tenderness. She looked with secret yearning and envy upon those confidential friends whose inmost lives were known to each other, on happy lovers, on married pairs who lived in perfect union, heart and soul allied. There was no such blessed intimacy for *her*. She had no sorrow she could confide, no trouble she could tell to her nearest friend. There was only a dull aching sense of a disappointment that she could explain to none, could not clearly and openly formulate even to herself in the safety of unspoken soliloquy. She could only feel that she had looked up to love, and love had failed her, and, failing, had left her life "flat, stale and unprofitable."

She had really no history, if we regard history as a record of events. Such as her story was, it had been an uneventful one—a plain dull chapter of everyday life.

She had been a very young girl—quiet, dreamy and reserved, but full of romance and poetry, with a vein of unsuspected potentiality of passion beneath the placid surface, when Gervas Fitzallan met her first. Pale and slight and fair, like a tall garden lily, with her large dreaming eyes, so calm, so pure, she looked a creature almost too ethereal for earth. There seemed to him a kind of moonlight atmosphere about her, and he fell in love at first sight.

His ardent wooing took her captive; she was in truth a Puritan, with a dash of Southern blood in her; that hidden current ran warm and strong beneath the sedate Puritan calmness, which was in reality rather of her bringing up than of her nature; and the Southern fire in her heart kindled responsive to the passion with which he sought her.

He was then so desperately in love with her that she could not fail to feel an answering thrill—to fancy that she loved him too.

So they were married after a brief courtship; and then gradually, slowly, but surely, disenchantment and disappointment came.

The fire of the honeymoon burnt itself out very quickly in Gervas Fitzallan's heart; but it was not his cooling love that caused the dull life-long ache of disappointment that marred Asenath's life. She was not one of the ultra-sentimental women who cannot accept the transition from romance to reality in married life as the natural course of things, who cannot get over the grievance of the change from lover to husband—from bride to wife. She did not complain of the bridegroom's waning ardour when the bridal days had fallen into the past; she knew the orange-blossoms must wither, and she resigned herself contentedly to the descent from the heights of rapture to settlement on the comfortable familiar level of everyday existence. Even when Fitzallan had ceased to be "in love" with her he did not weary of her; he was kind, and reasonably considerate—nay, more than that, every now and then flashes of his old passion for her leapt from the ashes, which had never grown quite cold. She had no fault to find with his conduct to her; there was no reason why her married life should not have been a perfectly contented, even happy one, if only—if only——

What was that great *if* that spoilt it all? Her own heart alone could give the answer, and even in the secrecy of self-communion she resolutely refrained from putting it into plain words—that the disappointment was not in her husband's love for her, but in *himself*.

Asenath was not of the nature in which love can live long without respect and perfect trust. To her the first necessity in loving was to be able to look *up* to the beloved. At least, if there lay deep in her any capacity for a love so great and deep as to enwrap and embrace its object, failings, faults and all, in a mantle of all-enduring tenderness and limitless loyalty, neither she nor any one else had ever discovered it. As far as she knew herself, to really love she *must* respect and reverence—above everything, *must trust*, *must* rely in implicit faith on the truth of the beloved. And it was just in inspiring her with this faith that Gervas Fitzallan failed, and just this failure which marred their two lives and sowed the seed of bitterness between them; for he resented that she was not as other women—that affection drew no blinding bandage over her clear eyes; and while deep in *her* heart lay the bitterness of feeling something wanting in him with whom she had pledged herself to pass her life, *his* keen eyes could read, beneath her constant endeavour to be a gentle, helpful and dutiful wife, that she had no real sympathy with his failings, no tenderness for his faults—faults which another woman might well have condoned while he was kind to *her*, but just the faults for which Asenath had by nature no sympathetic tolerance.

Even his magnetic power failed with her; he had tried to mesmerize her, but in vain, and this too annoyed him; he was chronically irritated by the impossibility of subjugating her to his

influence, though she never lapsed from faithful, loyal, and even submissive duty; and as the crust of coldness over her nature froze harder, firmer, he never realized that the sense of a failure in their union ached more sorely in *her* heart than in *his*.

CHAPTER VIII.

“SHE SHINES ME DOWN.”

“The tale is old and often told,
And lived by more than you suppose.”

IF Dr. Fitzallan entertained any doubts as to the continuance of his mesmeric influence over Eileen Dundas, and of the opportunities for exercising it, such doubts were speedily set at rest. It really seemed as if all circumstances expressly combined to favour him. Eileen caught a chill, and was feverish and full of pain. Mrs. Percival was sure that Dr. Fitzallan could do her good; Geoffrey was safely off the scene; and furthermore, a prank of Fate called Mrs. Percival out of the room on an errand, and left doctor and patient alone for a little while.

Dr. Fitzallan did not neglect his opportunity. He adroitly availed himself of the chance of setting Eileen's mind at peace, and soothing her into a mental attitude which favoured his influence. He introduced Geoffrey's name, alluding to him in amicable and admiring terms; then, taking care not to startle her maiden shyness and unconsciousness, he delicately touched upon Mr. Carresford's very natural and commendable anxiety about her health. He treated it as quite a matter of course that her cousin should at first feel some doubts regarding a method of cure that to *him* was novel, but expressed an easy confidence in his eventual approbation, and dwelt sanguinely on his certain pleasure at finding her so much better. His kindly and sympathetic tone, so lightly accepting the girl's dependence on her cousin Geoffrey's opinion, so delicately avoiding any suggestion of attributing special significance to it, established just that feeling of friendly confidence between them which he desired and intended. Eileen's gentle and unsuspecting nature proved plastic as wax in his hands, and he easily riveted his regained influence over her, and blotted out of her mind the impression of that one episode wherein it had failed; but he was resolved that it should be many a long day before he would risk the preservation of that influence by again exposing it to the test of conflict with Geoffrey. Carresford's depreciation, seeing that even his unspoken doubt was a power with Eileen.

The acquaintance between the Fitzallans and the Percivals progressed satisfactorily to all. Mrs. Fitzallan became a frequent visitor at the Percivals', and Mrs. Percival called on Mrs. Fitzallan. So did the girls, in detachments—for the quartette seldom went

about together in full force; and so did Ray, either in company with some member of his family or alone. He enjoyed the latter visits most, especially if the doctor chanced to be out, and he thus had the pleasure of a *tête-à-tête* chat with the doctor's wife, a chat always of a purely impersonal kind—just such a talk about current books and topics of the day as he might have had with a grandmother or maiden aunt, only somehow much more interesting. He wasted a little trouble on the occasions of his first unaccompanied visits to the Fitzallans, in devising plausible excuses for calling; he would appear with an elaborate pretext of a message from his mother or his sister, or a book that Mrs. Fitzallan had expressed a wish to read; but he soon dropped giving reasons as an unnecessary proceeding, for the Fitzallans saw nothing at all surprising or calling for remark in his visits. Mrs. Fitzallan rather liked Ray Percival; there was something frank and straightforward about his manner, a clear, honest look in his eyes, a mingling of gentleness with high spirit and quick temper, sensitiveness and pride, that pleased her. She showed a mild and temperate measure of kindly interest in him and his doings, and talked to him almost as to a brother. She intimated with sisterly frankness that to her mind he led rather an idle life, and that she considered it would be very much better for him if he were compelled to put his hand to the plough and earn his daily bread, in which, in truth, she was not far wrong.

Geoffrey Carresford was quite as active as his nephew in proving the exception to the rule that Atlantic acquaintances drift and drop on landing; but whilst Ray pursued this proof with the Fitzallans, his uncle took a similar course with the Rockleighs, and was indeed an even more frequent visitor there than was Ray at the Fitzallans'.

The Percivals always divided forces when going out. With their wonted cheerful view of things, they used to remark upon the advantage of being so large a family, as it often happened in the season that they had several invitations to different entertainments for the same evening, and there was no difficulty in sending representatives to each and all. One evening Mrs. Percival had three stalls sent to her for a new drama which was struggling for success. Geoffrey, who had not seen it, graciously offered to escort two of the girls, and the lot fell to Gertrude and Eileen. A happy trio took their seats just before the curtain drew up—Gertrude serenely prepared to enjoy herself, Geoffrey with that comfortable and genial expression to which after all no epithet is so perfectly applicable as "jolly," and Eily in the sixth heaven.

Eileen seldom thought of her own appearance; if she did not exactly class herself as the ugly duckling, she was accustomed to regard it as an accepted fact that the other three girls were prettier than she was, and that beside lovely Kitty in particular her little pale face was nowhere; but that evening she was happily

conscious that she was looking her very best. She had lingered—as it was little her habit to do—before the glass in a soft flush of shy pleasure, to think she should look well in the only eyes she cared to please! Not that she ventured to hope that Geoffrey would take any notice whether she looked well or ill, except that in the latter case he might observe, “Why, hullo, little one! what’s the matter with *you*? Seedy, eh?”

She really was looking pretty. Her dress was of that creamy tint so much more becoming to a pale complexion than pure white; a half-open tea-rose nestled in the soft coils of her dark hair; her hazel eyes were always lovely, large and dreamy and gentle; and pleasure had brought a delicate rose-flush to her cheeks.

Gertrude settled herself to enjoy the play, and follow the fortunes of a pair of unlucky lovers, who had an uphill fight against fate in the triple shape of a stern father, an amorous prince and an evil-minded colonel.

Eileen was following the stage-story also with the surface of her mind; but underneath that superficial interest lay the deeper, fuller consciousness that Geoffrey was beside her: Geoffrey, kind and smiling, big and fair and strong, a more splendid figure by far in her eyes than the beautiful cavalier on the stage. She had got Geoffrey virtually to herself for the whole happy evening long, for Gertrude would devote her interest chiefly to the drama.

Geoffrey being rather far back in the stalls, put up his opera-glass for a critical inspection of the rising star who impersonated the heroine, and having confided to Eileen in a sufficiently audible whisper that she was a long sight better-looking *off* the stage than *on* it—a fine woman, but badly got-up, and what a wig!—he apparently found the stage scene insufficient to engross his attention, and turned his lorgnette round the house. He put it down suddenly, and bowed in his most *empressé* way towards a box on the grand tier, with a sparkle of pleasure in his cool blue eyes, a sudden deepening of the healthy colour on his cheek—slight, but perceptible to Eileen’s love-quickenened observation.

“There are the Rockleighs,” he said, turning to her with the smile of pleasure still on his face. And henceforth his eyes kept turning involuntarily to the Rockleighs’ box, his intention evidently more fixed on it and its inmates than on the stage. Directly the curtain fell on the first act, Geoffrey was on his feet.

“I must just go up and speak to Lady Rockleigh,” he observed; “you don’t mind being left for a minute or two, girls?”

His minute or two lasted until the curtain had risen on the second act, during which interval the attention of his sister and cousin had been quietly devoted to him as his was more openly concentrated on one of the two ladies in the box. Both these latter, as Gertrude and Eileen observed, were beautiful women, their beauty set off by their perfect toilette; one was tall, bright-

coloured, golden-haired ; the other smaller, younger, darker-haired, but as fair of complexion.

"Was that Lady Rockleigh you were talking to, Geoff?" asked Gertrude.

"Which?" he inquired. "I was talking to them both."

"The one in peach-colour, with the dark hair."

"No, that's not Lady Rockleigh, that is Lady May."

"Oh!" said Gertrude with frank interest; "so *that* is Lady May, is it?"

Eileen said nothing, but her eyes went as often as Geoffrey's now to that box, and dwelt on that dainty little figure in the peach-bloom dress, with the diamonds glittering on her fair neck.

The moment the second act was over, Geoffrey was off again.

"Well," remarked Gertrude, "we don't get very much of Geoff's society to-night, do we, Eily? He seems to find plenty to say to Lady May Rivers."

And so he did. How splendid he looked, Eileen thought, as his comely fair head bent over the graceful, piquante, dark-eyed beauty! Yes, Lady May *was* a beauty; there was no denying it. What a delicious dimpling smile she had! what a pretty way of glancing up from under the long dark eye-lashes, as she played with the feathers of her fan, her eyes now downcast, so that the shadow of those long lashes showed on her cheek, now darting up that swift, sparkling, smiling glance!

How much Geoffrey seemed indeed to find to talk about to her!—he who never troubled himself to make conversation for the women-kind of his own family circle!

Gertrude was smiling and tapping time lightly with her fan as the band played a brilliant waltz. It did not spoil *her* evening for her brother to be a conspicuous figure in Lady Rockleigh's box. She thought with sedate sisterly pride how handsome Geoff looked in his faultless evening dress, and to what advantage his fine figure showed beside Lord Rockleigh, who certainly was an insignificant, ugly little aristocrat. It was fortunate for Gertrude that she could endure with equanimity the deprivation of her brother's society, as he did not favour them with much of it that evening. During the performance, of course, he returned to his seat; but between the acts he spent his time with the Rockleighs. And Eileen felt that the evening to which she had looked forward so eagerly, which had opened so brightly and promisingly, was turned to disappointment. The brilliant scene, the dazzle of lights and bright dresses and smiling faces, was all overshadowed for her; the play was dull and dreary; she did not care in the least whether the persecuted hero and heroine were slain or saved. She had set out so happy, with so light a heart, and now the sweet fruit was all turned to bitter ashes. The bright sanguine spirit in which she had started, sank down quenched in cold, cold waters, as she looked up at the picture framed in by the curtains of that box—

the picture of those two fair women, and Geoffrey bending over the fairest of the two.

Yet when they got home, and Geoffrey, who was staying there to sup and sleep that night, and who was clearly in high good-humour, inquired :

"Well, baby, and did you enjoy the play?" she replied eagerly: "Yes, *so much!*" and forced a bright pleased smile.

A day or two after this, it happened that Mrs. Percival, Gertrude and Eileen, escorted by Ray, were at one of the Wednesday *promenades* at the Botanic Gardens. The two girls had kept together for a time while Ray sauntered along with his mother; then Mrs. Percival and Gertrude sat down, and Ray took Eileen for a walk round.

The gardens were looking their loveliest under the summer sky; the flower beds and borders were a blaze of colours, here massed in harmonized and graduated shades of the same hue, there arranged in bold and vivid contrast. The women in their light summer dresses swarmed about the paths and on the smooth green lawns like living, moving flowers.

Eileen and Ray strolled leisurely along, as contented as either could be out of the presence of the one only and especial object of interest. They were thoroughly good friends, these two, albeit not especially devoted to each other.

Indeed no one could have been brought up with Eily, as Ray had been, without affectionately appreciating the tenderness and sweetness of her disposition; while it would have been equally difficult for any woman to live in the house with Ray without growing more or less fond of him; he was blessed with the happy gift of winning affection without effort—of pleasing without laying himself out to please—not so much by merit, as by grace of his fine figure and good looks, his pleasant voice and his sympathetic smile, the charm of his warm brown eyes, with their mingling of softness and fire; and if his high spirit did occasionally run into hasty temper, that was really no inconvenience to his own people, as nothing was ever allowed to thwart or cross "dear Ray" at home.

He and Eileen had wandered off the lawns, out of the thickest of the crowd; and sauntering down a path whereon the stream of people grew thinner and thinner as they went further, they at last turned a corner and came upon a completely secluded nook—a cosy seat in a recess screened by masses of rhododendrons—and sitting in contented isolation in these sequestered shades, on a bench thoughtfully constructed for two and no more, lo! Geoffrey Carresford and Lady May Rivers, evidently deeply absorbed in the charms of each other's society.

They both looked up with rather a startled air as the other two young people came suddenly upon them. Lady May coloured as she recognized Ray Percival; but Eileen flushed even more deeply at this meeting. Her first impulse was to turn away, beat a hasty

retreat; she had even half put out her hand to Ray with an instinctive movement as if to draw him back, but fortunately her slight involuntary gesture passed unnoticed; they had come so suddenly and so close upon the other pair it would have been impossible to turn and pass on unobserved and undisturbing.

"Hullo, Ray! and Eileen? Why, where on earth did you spring from?" exclaimed Geoffrey, apparently more astonished than delighted.

"Shot up through a trap-door," replied Ray, and then turned to Lady May with a smiling and cordial greeting.

Geoffrey introduced Eileen. "My cousin, Miss Dundas," and Lady May held out a little lavender-gloved hand very graciously, with her prettiest smile. A sharp twinge of pain—a new strange pain she did not understand—ran through Eileen's heart as she looked on Lady May's face in the broad daylight and realized how lovely it was. A moderate degree of good looks may often pass as beauty in a box at the theatre, just out of the glare of the gaslight, and with all the accessories of evening toilette; but here, in the full flood of the searching sunlight that mercilessly picks out every little blemish, Lady May was flawlessly fair, and fresh as an unfolding rose with the dew on it. Her eyes had the velvety softness of a gazelle's.

"Is the mater here, Ray?" asked Geoffrey.

"Yes, and Gertrude; they're sitting listening to the band."

"I want you to see my sisters," observed Geoffrey, turning to Lady May. "They are here, Ray says, over by the band."

"Shall we walk that way?" she suggested with amiable and ready responsiveness; and the *we* gave poor Eileen another prick of that new pain.

So they turned back towards the spot where the band was playing, and where Mrs. Percival and Gertrude sat, Geoffrey and his fair lady leading the way, but Ray and Eileen kept close enough to be in at the introduction.

Nothing could be sweeter than May's manner in making acquaintance with Geoffrey Carresford's sisters. She sat down beside Mrs. Percival, and entered into conversation directly, chatting in the pleasantest and most cordial way.

"I suppose you know my son already, Lady May?" observed Mrs. Percival, whose thoughts turned with the constancy of the sunflower to her boy, and whose looks and words were apt to follow her thoughts.

"Oh, yes! we were fellow-travellers across the Atlantic," Lady May replied, casting one of her captivating glances up at Ray—a wasted glance! she had better have saved it for Geoffrey. "I should hardly have thought you had a grown-up son, Mrs. Percival," she added graciously.

"I married out of the schoolroom," said Mrs. Percival, well pleased with the compliment and with the consciousness that it was

a justifiable and reasonable one. Indeed, she had heard it often before, but it was none the less pleasant for repetition. Another remark which Lady May presently volunteered in a sympathetic tone: "You must be very proud of your son," was one which Mrs. Percival could not hear too often; it bore repeating even better than a compliment to her own well-preserved looks.

"Oh, yes, she *is*," Gertrude answered for her. "My sister is not in the least ashamed of having married out of the nursery, and afflicted *me* with a great tall nephew ever so much bigger than myself!"

"It must be like having another brother," said Lady May sweetly. "Indeed I think you are very much to be envied—I have no brothers, and I only wish I had!"

The conversation thus happily commenced and turned on to such sympathetic topics, ran on velvet. Mrs. Percival's heart warmed to Lady May at once; and Gertrude Carresford seldom talked so freely and familiarly to a new acquaintance as she found herself talking within ten minutes of introduction to Lady May, the charm of whose sympathetic manner rarely indeed failed in its effect. Geoffrey looked on, beaming but laconic, and Eileen sat by in silence.

So satisfactorily did the acquaintance develope, that before they parted Lady May had asked Mrs. Percival to come and see her, and Mrs. Percival, happening to glance at Geoffrey and catching the eagerness of his look, urging her to respond cordially, obeyed her brother's unspoken but evident wish.

"But, Geoffrey, dear, you know," she observed demurringly afterwards, "that Lady May being of higher rank, it is, properly speaking, *her* place to call on *me*."

"Oh, well, Mary," he replied, unable to deny his sister's proposition, "I don't see that you need go in so heavily for ceremony and conventionality. Lady May has evidently taken a liking to you, and *she* isn't stiff and formal and—all that kind of thing, and why should *you* be? Come, Momie, don't be pokerish! it isn't your nature to. I want you to go and call on Lady May, and—and—er——"

"And make myself agreeable, as *is* my nature to," laughed Mrs. Percival, correctly interpreting his pause.

And of course she did as Geoffrey desired; she went to see Lady May Rivers, and the fair young widow made herself perfectly charming, and introduced her stately aunt, Lady Rockleigh, and even persuaded the latter to accompany her on her return call at Mrs. Percival's.

"Do you want me to go with you, May dear?" Lady Rockleigh asked with her languid air. "I have so much too long a visiting list already"—she heaved a sigh as one sorely overworked—"and these Percivals are very nice, no doubt, but they're not at all in our set."

"No, but there's no knowing whether they may not be in it—some day," May replied demurely.

"Oh! sits the wind in that quarter, May?"

"The wind chops and changes," May laughed lightly; "but one cannot have too many strings to one's bow!"

The lovely Lady May certainly did not err on the side of not having strings enough in reserve. When Geoffrey Carresford was not at her elbow, some other more or less eligible man *was*—very often the Honourable Algy Vesey. Lady Rockleigh regarded it as a settled thing in her own mind that her niece would marry again soon. She approved of marriage on principle, less as a matter of sentiment than as a thoroughly desirable institution; she thought it would be a great pity for May to waste her youth and beauty in widowhood, and she made it a point to be gracious to each and all of the sundry admirers who hovered in the light of May's sometimes fickle smiles and often burnt their wings. If May chose to favour Mr. Carresford—well, he was not a bad match, better indeed than the Honourable Algernon, notwithstanding the latter's higher rank and family connections. Algy Vesey had next to no money; Mr. Carresford had plenty. Algy Vesey was known to be heavily in debt; no such repute attached to Mr. Carresford; and the Carresfords were of good stock enough, a family *sans reproche*.

Lady Rockleigh herself did not see much in Geoffrey—there were plenty of those big, blond, brainless fellows about. For her part she thought, as far as looks, manner, and expression went, that Ray Percival was worth twenty of him; but there was no accounting for tastes, and if May wished her to show attention to Mr. Carresford's relatives, certainly she would humour May by calling on his sister, which she did.

And so the position came about which Geoffrey desired; his own people were on visiting terms with Lady May's people. He had gained his wish, just as Ray had *his*; the desired circle of acquaintance was complete. Lady May Rivers and Mrs. Fitzallan and the Percival family all met on a pleasant and amicable footing. Yet neither Geoffrey nor Ray found that this realization of their secret wishes carried with it quite as full and complete satisfaction as they had fondly fancied it would.

Certainly there was a good deal of pleasure to be gathered from this sort of social intercourse. Every entertainment, public or private, was the brighter for the chance of meeting there—even though it were but a little mustard-seed of a chance, and though the meeting might be a mere casual glimpse, a passing salutation.

Yes, there was a pleasure in the mere fact of the established acquaintance; but the pleasure was marred by little stings of disappointment, vexation, of often vague and apparently causeless annoyance.

It was pleasant at the Eton and Harrow match at Lord's, when the three parties met and mingled, and had their pic-nic lunch

together, and Geoffrey got a place beside Lady May, while Ray enlightened Mrs. Fitzallan on what were to her the dark mysteries of cricket. But it would have been pleasanter to Geoffrey if the Rockleigh party had not been increased by the presence of not only the Honourable Algy, but also of a certain handsome Colonel Frere. With the company of both these gentlemen Geoffrey could well have dispensed, as Lady May divided her attention quite equally and impartially between the three. And Ray would have better enjoyed initiating Mrs. Fitzallan into the mysteries of batting, bowling and fielding, if the doctor had not been hard by his wife's elbow. Not that Asenath Fitzallan was one of those women to whom men talk in one tone before their husbands' faces and another behind their backs, nor that Ray Percival had the faintest idea of uttering a syllable to her which the doctor was not perfectly welcome to hear; but he certainly felt more free and unconstrained in his conversation with her when her husband was not by.

Dr. Fitzallan had little reason now to apprehend any interference of Geoffrey Carresford's between him and his interesting patient and subject, Eileen Dundas. Geoffrey's thoughts were too much occupied with May Rivers for him to trouble himself about what was going on at the Percivals'; he had said his say, and now, especially as the treatment was entirely under Mrs. Percival's sanction, and at least tacitly approved by Ray, Geoffrey, as he observed, left them to "paddle their own canoe," so long as Eileen seemed rather the better than the worse.

His refraining from any open disapprobation or interference now was perhaps partly due to the influence of Lady May, who dabbled a little in spiritualism in a shallow sentimental way, and was rather fond of reading tales of magic and mystery, and fancied she understood what they meant—which was more than the author did sometimes! She expressed interest in Dr. Fitzallan's mesmeric treatment of Miss Dundas, assured Geoffrey it would be a thousand pities to offer any obstacle to the pursuit of such very interesting experiments, and even hinted a desire to be present some day on one of those occasions.

Dr. Fitzallan, although he received this suggestion with bland courtesy, allowed the "some day" to remain thus vague, and did not forthwith proceed, as might have been expected, to fix the day and the hour. He liked inspiring curiosity and interest, and was specially anxious to ingratiate himself in the favour of families like the Rockleighs, who might be useful to him in his career; but he perceived that Lady May's presence at any experiments would mean Geoffrey Carresford's presence too.

Eileen continued better in health, but in variable spirits. There was a growing pain of restless discontent in her heart—even sometimes a feeling of bitterness, that was new and strange indeed to her gentle nature—as she watched Geoffrey's increasing

devotion to Lady May. Eileen, always modest, shy and retiring, had never thought of appraising Geoffrey's feelings for *her*, any more than she did of analysing her own for *him*. Her life-long habit had been to be glad at his coming and sad at his going, without questioning how much or how little *he* felt—her life-long attitude one of looking up, in a blind, child-like faith and love that expected little, exacted nothing, of response. It had always been her joy to see Geoffrey happy. But now it turned her sick and sore at heart to see that Lady May could bring a brighter light to his eyes, a happier smile to his face, than *she* could ever bring. Then she shrank with horror and dismay from the recognition of her own feelings—called herself wicked, selfish, contemptible!—asked herself in miserable and perplexed self-reproach, what *had* come to her, that she could grudge Geoffrey his pleasure because he sought it more abroad than at home—his enjoyment of a brighter, livelier presence, a fairer face, than hers?

It had never been so before; never till lately had Geoffrey's enjoyment of life and its good things been aught but reflected joy to her—and now, was it possible she was so basely selfish and mean a creature that his pleasure was her grief?

Dr. Fitzallan had discovered that there were moods in which she was less susceptible to his influence than in others; and he had little difficulty in always tracing the clue of the cause of these moods to Geoffrey Carresford and to something he had said or done—or left unsaid and undone.

Geoffrey for his part took no very great notice of Dr. Fitzallan; he was not particularly interested in the Fitzallans; he left them to Ray; but one day he did remark:

"Curious eyes that fellow Fitzallan has."

"I believe most people with strong mesmeric power have those peculiar, piercing eyes," said Ray.

"Sometimes I fancy I've seen eyes just like his before—somewhere—I can't recall where," observed Geoffrey, knitting his brows in perplexed thought.

"There's nothing so very uncommon about them in shape and colour—it's that clear penetrating look," said Mrs. Percival.

"I daresay among the millions and billions of eyes in the world, there may be a good many pairs like his—or like any one else's, for that matter," suggested Ray.

"Yes; they say that every man has his double," remarked Gertrude, "and every individual feature must have its exact counterpart somewhere, probably a good many counterparts."

"To be sure it must," agreed Geoffrey. "I must have seen eyes like this Fitzallan's at some time—there's a reminiscence about them that I can't trace. And now, by the way," he added, with much warmer interest, "there's something—I wonder if any of you ever noticed it?—a sort of look about Eileen's eyes now and then, which rather reminds me of—of Lady May."

This was true ; there was a resemblance between those two pairs of large soft brown eyes, of the gazelle type both, although they were different in expression—May's glance having subtleties, allurements and coquetries, which to Eileen's were unknown.

Eileen coloured scarlet under Geoffrey's careless, kindly scrutiny, as he drew attention on her thus. As a rule she was pleased at any notice from him, especially when it was directed to her in a way so undoubtedly complimentary ; but now she felt a sting of unaccountable bitterness at what *ought* to have gratified her—the suggestion of a resemblance between her and the woman who was evidently Geoffrey's ideal of beauty and grace and charm. It only hurt her with a galling sense of contrast. If her eyes were pretty, they were pretty in vain !

She winced as they all looked at her and made easy comments on the slight resemblance ; but she forced a light laugh as she replied gaily that she was very much flattered to think that anything about her could remind anybody of Lady May.

The conversation, thus shifted, did not return to Dr. Fitzallan. But if he had chanced to hear those few random words, that idle snatch of passing talk, it might have changed the course of many destinies—as a little spark of lamp light may warn a great ship off the breakers and save a thousand lives.

CHAPTER IX.

"A BRIGHT PARTICULAR STAR!"

"The dimpled hand—a snowy dove !
I should have seized it, reaching so,
But something bade me back !—a ban !
Around the third fair finger ran
A shining, hateful hoop of gold !"

It was a warm, still summer evening, mellow with sunset ; the trees in the Percivals' garden stood out in dark motionless masses against the deepening blue of the cloudless sky.

The lawn was dotted with garden-seats, chairs and campstools grouped sociably close together, and all occupied, as the whole party were sitting out of doors enjoying their after-dinner coffee, the party on this occasion comprising the resident family circle, Geoffrey Carresford, who might be counted as a sort of irregular resident, and one who was not a resident at all—Mrs. Fitzallan, who was for a wonder unaccompanied by her husband. The doctor was dining out elsewhere, and Mrs. Percival had asked his wife to spend her evening with them.

Asenath Fitzallan was very much at home with all the Percival household by this time. She liked them—liked the open and undisguised family pride and affection among them all, though

sometimes it made her feel a little sad ; she used to contemplate it with a sort of envy devoid of bitterness. She liked the proprietary and possessive ways they had with each other. In that warm and genial atmosphere of affection and kindness, the thin crust of smooth ice that had frozen over the surface of her nature came nearer to melting away than it did anywhere else. Eileen and Rhoda had taken an especial fancy to Mrs. Fitzallan, Rhoda interested in her perhaps by that curious freak of the law of attraction which often draws us towards our contrasts—the demonstrative to the reserved, and *vice versâ*, while there was a more real sympathy between Mrs. Fitzallan and Eileen. These two girls were sitting by her now, one on either side, rather to Ray's disappointment ; he had intended for himself the chair into which Rhoda had slipped. His pointer, old Ponto, had a comfortable place beside her ; the dog's sleek brown muzzle rested on her knee and her hand on his head.

The whole party were more or less indolently and comfortably disposed ; the two men smoking, the women lounging in their low chairs, all enjoying the delicious *dolce far niente* influences of the warm, sultry, mellow evening ; even the girls were not talking very vigorously, intervals of sociable silence alternating with desultory and fragmentary conversation.

"I say, Momie," said Geoffrey, suddenly cutting into one of those pauses of silence ; "have you heard or seen anything of old Mrs. Bridges lately ?"

"No, dear, not very lately."

"I wish you or one of the girls would look her up," he resumed ; "the poor old soul's in a very shaky state ; I think some of us ought to go and see her, and we might send her some wine and things."

"One of your *protégés* ?" observed Mrs. Fitzallan, looking at Mrs. Percival with the mild superficial interest one either feels or thinks it right to express in any subject that comes up in the circle of which one forms a part.

"No, we can't call it that!" replied Mrs. Percival ; "she is a dear old lady, in whom we all take a great interest ; the widow of a faithful old clerk of my father's, who met his death in our service in a very tragic way."

"He was murdered defending our property," said Geoffrey with a shade less nonchalance than usual ; "and of course the least we can do is to look after the widow."

"Of course," agreed Mrs. Fitzallan. "How did it happen ?"

"There was a young fellow employed in my father's office who took it into his head to rob the safe. Old Bridges caught him at it, and tried to stop him, and the young scoundrel hit him a crack on the head that killed him."

"It was supposed," added Mrs. Percival, "that he didn't *mean* to murder him, only to stun him ; and partly on that account

and partly on the plea of his youth, he got off with penal servitude for life."

"If you can call it 'getting off!'" interposed Geoffrey. "For my part, I should think he'd rather have been hanged!"

"I should think he wouldn't," said Ray, "considering that he met with a much better end; he was drowned trying to escape, wasn't he?"

"I think we did hear that," said Geoffrey; "and a good job too. Well, Momie, you or Gertie will go and see Mrs. Bridges, won't you? And mind she wants for nothing."

"We'll go to-morrow, Geoff," his sisters promised.

"I was dreaming of that poor old soul all last night," Geoffrey observed, "and I suppose that's put her into my head."

"Do your friends depend on your dreams for your recollection?" asked Mrs. Fitzallan smiling.

"Not all of them, I fancy," remarked Ray.

"Well, I do think there's something in dreams," said Geoffrey stolidly; "I know that I've often had very odd sort of dreams when anything's been going to happen."

"What kind of dreams?" she inquired with more interest.

"Why, like—like—" Geoffrey was not good at definition—"a sort of foreshadowing of something. Now just before we all got scarlet fever, which Gertie here was obliging enough to bring us home from school, I had the queerest dreams, all about doctors and sick rooms and that sort of thing."

"If you were sickening for fever, it was natural enough you should have feverish fancies," Mrs. Fitzallan observed practically.

"And then," continued Geoffrey, warming to his subject, "you remember, Ray, when you nearly got drowned at Hastings, I dreamt I saw you fished out of the water. I knew quite well something had happened to you, before I heard a word about it."

"Yes, Geoffrey is one of the true dreamers," said Gertrude with an air of conviction and rather proudly.

"Do you believe in true dreams, Mrs. Fitzallan?" asked Ray.

"I don't see why a true premonition should not be conveyed in a dream as well as by a waking instinct or presentiment," she replied. "Our dreams are nine hundred and ninety-nine times the mere wanderings of the imagination unguided by reason; but the thousandth time a dormant sense may awake."

Kitty and Rhoda presently made a diversion from the discussion on dreams by getting up and going off together for a stroll round the garden—probably to enjoy some confidences of a more personal character than were possible in the comparative publicity of the general family circle; for these two—both of them more expansive and demonstrative than Gertrude and Eileen—had many girlish confidences. Their example was quickly followed by other couples; Ray promptly seizing on the opportunity of pairing off

with Mrs. Fitzallan, and indeed Geoffrey had not the slightest desire to forestall him.

Kate and Rhoda had gone down to the lowest of the terraced walks, the "Lower Depths;" Ray managed to linger with his companion in the second or "Shady Walk," so as to preserve the privilege of her society all to himself, although he had no more confidential observation to make to her than :

"You wouldn't think Geoffrey was a subject for dreams, would you?"

"Why not?"

"Why, because dear old Geoffrey isn't in the least what one would call—well, spiritual or imaginative. Now you, Mrs. Fitzallan, *are*," he added, suddenly becoming personal under the influences of the leafy solitude of Shady Walk, the mellow stillness of the faintly star-lighted dusk under the silent trees.

"You are quite mistaken," she replied tranquilly. "I am not in the least susceptible to abnormal influences. I never had a presentiment in my life. I never had a true dream."

"Neither had I," said Ray, always gratified to find himself in accord with her. "And yet I should have thought that I was more likely to—dream and all that, than Geoffrey. I am not a bit like him," he added meditatively.

"No, you are of quite different types," she agreed. "He seems to me the pure and typical Saxon, and you have all the Celtic characteristics."

"Have I?" he rejoined, well pleased that she had felt sufficient interest in him to study and classify his characteristics. "I think there are about equal strains of Saxon and Celtic blood in our family; and perhaps I have inherited all the qualities of the one, and Geoff of the other."

"Probably," she assented, "with the exception, however, of one quality—for it is evident that it is Mr. Carresford who has most of the faculty of intuition—that is, the susceptibility of receiving impressions otherwise than through the ordinary channels of the senses, which is more generally a characteristic of the Celtic race."

"It is a sort of sixth sense or second sight, isn't it?" asked Ray.

"Yes, and it is a great mistake to suppose that it is confined to any one class of mind or temperament. What *we* believe is that this power of intuition—an instinct half animal, half spiritual, but in its very essence purely unintellectual—is the survival of an almost extinct faculty belonging originally to an earlier stage of our race. Intellectual progress has left it behind; our civilization is stamping out the last traces of it. All but lost to humanity, it lingers still in animals. The dog sees more than man, is conscious of presences of which we have no perception. And so often the most sensitive, imaginative and highly cultivated people show no trace of this faculty, and we find it in the most practical, solid, matter of fact, and often indeed among the uneducated."

"Then it is no proof of high sensitiveness?"

"Yes, along the one line, but not necessarily in any other."

"I suppose," said Ray, lapsing into personality, "that you and Dr. Fitzallan think alike on all these matters?"

"These matters cover a very wide range," she answered. "We think alike on many points."

Here Kate and Rhoda came up from the lower walk.

"We are going in now," observed Rhoda. "Won't you come in and sing to us soon, Mrs. Fitzallan?"

"Yes, with pleasure. I will come now."

So they went indoors, into the bright, pretty drawing-room, with its rose-shaded lamps and its abundant flowers, and the hundred-and-one nameless graceful traces and tokens of pervading feminine presence; and Ray opened the piano, and Rhoda eagerly demanded of Mrs. Fitzallan the "robin song."

"What is the 'robin song?' something new?" asked Ray.

"No, years and years old," she said.

"But I never heard it till the other day when you sang it to us," exclaimed Rhoda.

"No, probably not; it is not published. The music is by a friend of mine—the words by one of our Pacific Slope poets, Charles Warren Stoddard," said Mrs. Fitzallan, running her fingers over the keys in a few opening chords.

Those to whom she had not sung what Rhoda termed the "robin song" before, naturally expected a tuneful babble about a robin picking berries and bread-crumbs in the garden, with probably a refrain of "tweet-tweet-tweet," to imitate the twitter of the bird. Instead of this, they listened to a curious, weird, mournful ditty telling of a caged robin that was the only living thing to witness the murder of its mistress.

The song opened with a snatch of light, bright and vivacious melody, and dropped suddenly, and yet not jarringly, into a wailing minor, with a tone alike eerie and plaintive in the refrain.

Often and often in the coming days Ray heard echoing in the chambers of memory Asenath Fitzallan's voice, singing with that strange, pathetic, passionate thrill in her rich contralto tones—singing as if her eyes saw the scene described:

"How still you sit,
In spite of it,
You saw the hand that slew!
You fear for me, and you, Robin,
Deux enfants perdus!"

"They lift you from the window,
They tempt you with a fruit;
O, Robin, Robin, you sit like stone!
And all your soul is mute.
O, Robin, strive,
If yet alive,
To cry *him* mercy too,
And peace for me and you, Robin,
Deux enfants perdus!"

Asenath had on a dress of one of her favourite nondescript tints ; it had a sort of shimmering opal effect of silvery and pearly hues, subtly shot with colour—a dress cut with long, simple curves and flowing lines—which became her, as most of her dresses did, as if designed for and suited to her and no one else ; her dead-leaf brown hair was coiled in rich heavy masses round her head. Ray noticed the deer-like poise of her graceful head, so matchlessly set upon the long white throat—noticed how fair and cool her slim hands looked as they strayed over the keys—nay, what was there of her beauty that his eyes did not note ?

The girls in their light dresses were grouped about the room ; Geoffrey had flung himself back comfortably in one of the big arm-chairs ; Mrs. Percival, with her sweet, bright, matronly face, and the heart-warmth in her tender smile, occupied the other. It was a pleasant, peaceful home picture, and that fair, grey-eyed woman singing at the piano was as the soul and central figure of it all. It was just so that Ray had wished to see her—thus in his own home, amongst his own people. And yet, now that she was here amongst them, that she looked like one of them, now that he could look on her face and listen to her voice, he was not content. There was a fever of mixed pain and pleasure in her presence, and the very pleasure of it stung and throbbed like pain. Already, although he scarcely realized it yet, the white angel of peace had spread her wings and flown out of his life ! The horizon but lately so clear was piled with ominous clouds ; and though even now he vaguely felt a shadow in the air, he little dreamt of a coming day when the memory of such hours as these, the picture of this sweet home-life, with its peaceful, innocent pleasures, should stab him through and through with such torture that he should crave to end it even by death—a day when the desire should burn in him like a flame to destroy his strong young life with his own hands.

But seldom indeed do we get a glimpse behind the black veil that mercifully shrouds the future from our view ; there is no shadowy hand to lift in warning a corner of its impenetrable folds, and in the present as yet Ray only felt that somehow the hour which should have been so sweet was marred by what was to him unexplained and incomprehensible bitterness.

She was singing the last verse, with a tone like the echo of a far-off wail in the sweet and mournful notes :

“ O call me with your warble
 Away from sin and woe.
 You hold the secret of the tears
 That none beside shall know !
 The day is past ;
 The die is cast ;
 Love perished where it grew !
 Now death for me—and you, Robin !
Deux enfants perdus ! ”

“ That’s an odd song,” observed Geoffrey in his blunt, downright

way. "It's very pretty, Mrs. Fitzallan, of course, but I can't quite make out the drift of it."

"No?" she said, looking round from the piano and smiling a gentle amused smile—such a smile as she often gave to Geoffrey Carresford very much as if he had been a big Newfoundland dog.

"Saxon?" suggested Ray, in a lower tone for her ear.

"Pure unadulterated Saxon!" she answered, also aside. "Does the Celtic mind require enlightenment as to the meaning?"

"Wont you sing us 'Twickenham Ferry' now?" asked Geoffrey, blissfully unconscious of the aside. "I like that; it's a pretty tune and pretty words."

Mrs. Fitzallan was amiably willing to sing that or anything else to please any one. Then Gertrude and Kate favoured the company with a duet; they sang fairly well, with pleasant but in no way noticeable voices. After the duet Mrs. Fitzallan was unanimously called upon to sing again—to sing Mrs. Percival's favourite, "Punchinello," and then Ray's favourite, "The Story of a Year."

"I wish I could sing—could sing like *you*!" said Eileen, looking at her admiringly when the piano was shut and the musical part of the evening over.

"Well, you used to sing very nicely, Eily," said Geoffrey kindly. "If you'd only practise, you'd sing simple little ballads very prettily."

Eileen softly shook her head.

"I never heard you sing, Miss Eileen," observed Mrs. Fitzallan.

"No, I left it off; I knew I could never do it *well*."

"One may give a great deal of pleasure without being a *prima donna*," Asenath rejoined.

She was standing beside Eileen, tall and beautiful in her queenly grace, beside the fragile figure and small pale features, her hand resting on the girl's slight shoulder with one of her quietly caressing touches.

"But you play, dear, don't you?" she continued.

"No."

"Eily never could stretch an octave," remarked Kate.

"I dare say not, with these little hands," said Mrs. Fitzallan smiling.

"Your hands are small, too," observed Ray, who occasionally jerked in remarks with a touch of Geoffrey's bluntness, notwithstanding their general unlikeness of tone and manner.

"No, I have very long fingers," she replied.

"There's a great deal of character in hands," said Mrs. Percival, joining the group. "Come, give us yours, Geoffrey, and yours, Ray. Now, see! here, this is a good group of contrasted hands, is it not?"

Mary Percival's own was rather large, but soft and shapely,

plump and pink—a purely womanly hand. Asenath Fitzallan's was long, slender, but firm and very white—its pure whiteness without a tinge of rose—the fingers tapering gently, but with no suggestion of weakness, to the filbert-shaped nails. Ray's hand, too, was long, supple and sinewy, strong, but with a certain delicacy of moulding—a well-finished hand, with nothing blunt or rough about it. Geoffrey's was exactly the hand one would have surely expected of him—broad, thick, solid, muscular, with blunt fingers, square at the tips, and indeed a general squareness of outline. Eileen's was a dainty hand, very small, slim and fair, like the gently curled leaf of a lily.

"Talk of contrast," Geoffrey said with a short amused laugh, pouncing on Eileen's little fairy fingers with his own big paw. "Here's a pair!"

Eileen flushed to the brow, and the little hand quivered slightly, but lingered in his as if in its natural home.

"There's more likeness between Ray's hand and Mrs. Fitzallan's than between any other two," Mrs. Percival observed with interest.

"There isn't much likeness in size, nor in *colour*," Ray demurred modestly, glancing from Asenath's long fair hand to his own larger one, which, however, for a man's, was reasonably white.

"Oh, Mrs. Fitzallan, can you tell fortunes by the hand?" exclaimed Kate eagerly.

"No; and I don't think I would if I could. Why should we spoil to-day by forecasting the disasters of to-morrow?"

"But perhaps we are not going to have any disasters," said Rhoda sanguinely.

Asenath looked at the girl's bright face with a gentle but rather sad smile.

"Perhaps not," she rejoined kindly. "I had mine told once," she added, "and once was quite enough!"

"Why?" asked Ray.

"Because if there is any truth in palmistry, there's a bad time before me."

Ray looked at her with a quick flash in his eyes which would have betrayed the warmth of the interest he felt in her if any one had chanced to note his expression at that instant. The idea of trouble, suffering, touching *her* sent a strange keen thrill through him that for the moment revealed itself in his glance—but only for the moment, and it passed unobserved. As a rule he controlled his looks as well as his words. Although never in his life a dissembler before, he had fallen in the way of dissembling, and successfully now. He hid from all the world the depth and warmth of the feeling he could no longer conceal from himself. The thought of Asenath Fitzallan was always with him, and that thought was growing fast to be only pain. At first it had been pure pleasure to see her, to talk to her, to watch her coming and

going; there had been gladness unalloyed in the greetings: and even the partings were sweetened to him by the prospect of meeting soon again. But little or no pleasure lingered now in all this; the best of it was only bitter-sweet, and the bitterness was fast drowning all the little sweetness that was left.

He had no rest away from her—no peace in her presence.

Ray Percival had never been very deeply moved by a woman's charms before. His few romances had been shallow and always perfectly innocent ones—rather boyish fancies than passions; they had done no harm either to himself or to any one else. As Geoffrey more than once told "Momie" reassuringly, "Ray had always run very straight!" He had never had the slightest sympathy with men who went in for sentimental philandering after married women. He was wont to say that he despised that sort of thing. When the time came that he should take unto himself a wife, he would like to catch any fellow philandering after *her!* and his line was to do as he would be done by. He had always been as confident in himself as his mother, encouraged by Geoffrey's favourable reports of Ray's avoidance of crooked paths, had been in him.

Careless even to recklessness in money matters, Ray had never carried that recklessness into his dealings with women.

Although no Galahad, he nevertheless had at least always held sound, wholesome Arthurian views of respect and reverence for women; his ideal was that of the Round Table, in the days before the canker spread through the knightly brotherhood:

"To love one maiden only—cleave to her!"

Yet now the haunting image of Dr. Fitzallan's wife troubled his hours both waking and sleeping, and even yet he scarcely realized himself the danger of the fire that waxed fiercer in his heart day by day. If he had been less confident in himself, more on his guard against such perils, this could not have come to pass; the flame might have been trampled out while yet only a smouldering spark. But the feeling had stolen upon him so insidiously—the frank and natural admiration for a beautiful face, the romance of the ocean voyage, the charm of friendly talk with an attractive and interesting woman—so by gradual stages a sentiment had grown to a passion. Even when he recognized the vein of romance in his admiring friendship, he had thought himself still safe—safe because she was married; and if there was one thing of which Ray Percival was sure, it was that the honour of another man's wife would always be sacred to him.

Of that he was sure still—surer than ever. Asenath Fitzallan was his ideal of pride and purity, of stainless womanhood, "chaste as ice and pure as snow;" he saw her as standing above him, in a purer, loftier air than that *he* breathed—high and white as a

glacier peak rearing its untouched brow to heaven. If any man had dared to insinuate a suggestion that in even the secret depth of his inmost heart he cherished one thought derogatory to her spotless honour, Ray would have promptly knocked him down and probably have half killed him for the insult.

(To be continued.)

ENGLISH PEOPLE ABROAD.

IT is strange but true that we English people, both men and women, are often very different creatures abroad to what we are at home. Those who live for any length of time on the continent see this very plainly, and are frequently made to feel most uncomfortable by the behaviour of their compatriots of both sexes, for whose conduct they seem in a measure to be answerable. Pride and love of one's country suffer often and severely in this respect. If it is only 'Arry and Hemma who behave rudely and are loud, the annoyance is but trifling and raises a smile, but when, as is too frequently the case, English men and women of good breeding behave as they would never dream of doing on their own soil, then we really do feel abased; for foreigners are quick to detect those who belong to the higher classes.

Pride of country, perhaps, lies at the root of this, to some extent, but it is not the right sort of pride: the feeling that to be English is to be of the most excellent nation on earth, and gives one the right to do just as one pleases, is not beautiful or attractive to strangers by any means. English men and women often excuse themselves on the plea that foreigners are too polite to be true, and that they feel bound to show them real John Bull bluntness in contradistinction. Or they deny that foreigners think them rude and exacting, because they always welcome British tourists so gladly, serve them so assiduously, and strive so earnestly to make them comfortable—spoil them, in fact; not recognizing the fact that all this politeness is really due to a purely commercial feeling, and to that civility which is a part of their training from babyhood.

British and American tourists are as a rule much richer than their continental cousins, and spend their money so lavishly, that they are eagerly looked for in most European countries, while even those who seek foreign towns in which to reside from economical reasons, such as good educational advantages combined with cheap living, generally make more outlay than the natives, who make more provision for the future. Consequently those places to which English people flock are always flourishing and well off; and the fact still remains that the prevailing feeling abroad is that we are purse-proud, exacting and decidedly wanting in politeness.

This, however, is the general opinion of only one class of individuals, though a large one—those who have never visited England at all, or for too short a time to become acquainted with our home

life, and who therefore form their opinions of all English people by those whom they meet in their own country.

Just now the continental press is kept pretty lively with a constant stream of letters complaining and giving instances of the pride and rudeness of British travellers, some of which are naturally absurdly exaggerated and laughable; but, unfortunately, much of the smoke might be traced to a tolerably strong fire. One reason for this doubtless is that we are seen at our best, and perhaps feel our best in our own country, for we are above all a home-loving race, and our men are much more domesticated than those of any other country. Our boys and girls, too, being on an equality, have their pleasures, exercises and games in common, and thus help to make our homes gay, bright and attractive. We Englishwomen have much, very much, to be thankful for, when we look round at our neighbours across the Channel and compare their position with our own.

In whatever direction we turn we see a distinct difference in home-life to ours, the husband and wife seeing little of each other except at meal times; he, as a rule, appearing in the character of lord and master, she as a good useful *haus-frau*, without whom he could not get on comfortably. Divided interests meet us on all sides; husband and wives, sons and daughters have separate and distinct friends and acquaintances, and entertain them irrespectively and independently of each other, excepting always that the wives or daughters are expected to send up good, daintily prepared fare on each and every occasion; and so on, one could enumerate scores of points on which they differ from us. Our position, on the contrary, is so secure, placing us on an equality with our husbands, that we, more than any other country, have opportunities for making of married life the truest and most lasting friendship, in which husband and wife rely on each other for that sound counsel and ready sympathy without which the home cannot possibly be really comfortable and happy, but must perforce be incomplete, if nothing worse.

That our home-life is the most beautiful in the world goes without saying. Sceptics may sneer and point to this example and that, to this report in a newspaper or to that divorce case, as proofs that there is something wrong about our marriage laws; and clamour with foolish tongues for changes that could bring nothing but disaster in their train; but this cannot alter the fact that the results of our system prove it to be an excellent one. If we one and all look among our friends and acquaintances with sharp but unprejudiced eyes and a clear understanding we must surely acknowledge that for one really unhappy and disastrous marriage, we can at least count ten, twenty, or even more, which are altogether happy and satisfactory.

Foreigners who visit our dear old England quickly recognize the excellence of our home-life and the influence it brings to bear on

the growing boys and girls of our families. They see and acknowledge the power of family unity, and are liberal-minded enough to speak in terms of the highest praise of the English at home. If it be true that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" then our foreign friends flatter us highly too, for those who have visited England almost always copy our home-life, when they return to their own country, and adopt many of our customs as nearly as possible.

This is particularly noticeable in Germany. In families where one or both have been brought into contact with English people we find the wives and daughters occupying a more honourable position, the husbands as a rule spending their evenings at home. All the members of the family appear and take their share in entertaining the friends who are invited for social gatherings and festive occasions, which are now mixed assemblies of both sexes. Also, Sunday is generally observed quite differently in such families, the whole party going *en masse* to church at least once if not twice a day. Shopping is not tolerated, nor such pleasure seeking as theatre and concert going, or evening parties where dancing or games are the order of the day.

Another fact that strikes one in Germany is that many Germans marry English wives, and that these marriages turn out exceedingly well; but, strange to say, in every case of the kind that has come under my notice, the wife has been chosen from an English home, not once from the large number of our girls who reside abroad for a time, mostly in foreign families, to learn the language, nor from those who are visiting friends or travelling on the continent. All these things seem to show that we as a nation are admired, esteemed and respected more when at home in our own country than in foreign lands; that we bring a certain refining influence to bear on foreigners who visit England, but have a very different effect indeed when visiting theirs. And this brings us back to our original subject—English people abroad.

Having tried to prove that when foreigners express a dislike to English people, they really only mean the tourist portion of our community, or those residing abroad for very short periods, I would beg most earnestly of all our people, and more particularly of our girls, to do all that lies in their power, and it is a great all, to do away with this feeling of dislike.

We are all more or less proud of our country, but this pride must be kept well within bounds, and if we know better, or perhaps do better, than others, we must acknowledge frankly that it is because we have enjoyed more advantages, not because we are better or nicer than our neighbours. We ought to see our own failings, too, and set about curing them. One, surely, is want of politeness, that true politeness which necessitates no falseeness, but is the natural outcome of a good heart, love to all mankind, and a well-regulated, evenly-balanced mind. Another of our faults is prejudice, looking

upon everything English as super-excellent, and despising things foreign, and even foreigners themselves, so openly that those who run may read. If we would one and all candidly own our failings to ourselves, it would be a great step towards curing them, and if we exert ourselves to appear to the same advantage abroad as at home and to act as consistently, we may enjoy the pleasurable and honourable pride of knowing that we are influencing other countries for their well-being.

Our home influence is strong and good, though it might be better, of course, but we want it to extend much further and in other directions; and I think few of us at home realize how our conduct is watched, when abroad, to see if it coincides with our professions and general behaviour at home. For instance, now that there is a pretty strong party in favour of keeping Sunday after our fashion, we are in honour bound to set a good example in this respect; but unfortunately we are very far from always doing so.

In continental towns where English people congregate in any numbers, so as to form colonies and have churches of their own, the influence for good is very strong, and almost all that could be desired; and it is wonderful to notice in such places how things alter in a few years. Our customs are widely adopted—shops, theatres and dancing rooms are closed on Sundays; Sunday schools and Bible classes are established for the young; and the pastors work hard to do away with the hurtful worldliness which has for years been gradually creeping into the act of confirmation.

How is it, though, with temporary residents and tourists abroad? My experience tells me that often they exert an influence the reverse of good, which tends to weaken that desire to change some of their questionable customs that so many good Germans as well as others feel at the present time. The cause of this, too, is one of which we ought to feel most thoroughly ashamed, for it has its origin in an inconsistency of conduct that makes our home-life appear one of persistent hypocrisy and outside show, and brings our country into very bad repute. For instance, all foreigners nearly know that in England our theatres, opera houses, concert rooms and such places of amusement are closed from conscientious motives, and that our Sunday is a quiet restful day given up to church-going, pleasant family reading and intercourse, with only pleasure of the most simple and harmless description. But from all quarters we hear of crowds of English people being seen on that day at *fêtes champêtres*, horse races, regattas, and many even at theatres and operas. That these reports are not without foundation I know, having seen many of my countrymen and women going to these places myself, and having heard a few words of warning and condemnation of such things given to our people from our pulpits abroad.

There is yet another grievance on this subject felt by foreigners,

and that is our conduct in foreign churches—that we are not quiet and polite in their places of worship, though reverent and devout in our own; and there is a good deal of truth in this. We go into their fine old cathedrals and splendid churches more to see them than anything else, particularly their Roman Catholic buildings, generally during the hours for service. We look about, whisper to each other, and point out different things to be admired, and after a little while one says to the other, “I am so tired of all this mumbling; do let us go out.” How should we like this conduct in our churches? It certainly seems only right that we should take the many hints broadly given to us that before or after service would be the most suitable time for inspecting all sacred edifices.

Shopping abroad is another piece of business about which we English often show exceedingly bad taste; first of all by persistently ignoring the custom of saying good-day on entering, and something equivalent on leaving the shops; and in all our transactions we are too apt to neglect and forget the words *merci bien* and *s'il vous plaît*, which go so long a way, and are expected from us by all. Living in large bustling English towns, where we must assert and look out for ourselves, or be passed over in the crowd, often leads to our being rather louder and more impatient than is good form in places where business is carried on more quietly and leisurely. Those who frequent shops and markets abroad must surely notice how politely and gently the purchasers do their business, and yet when English people appear on the scene it is altogether different. They chatter to each other in loud voices, demand the prices of this and that, and very likely in the end, after interrupting all business for some minutes, they will walk out without buying anything whatever. The fuss and noise are sometimes more than one can well bear with patience, and yet it is of constant and daily occurrence, so that one wonders how the patience of the unfortunate shop people can possibly last out; but their politeness is so well cultivated that it is elastic to a degree. One day a friend and I were in a fancy workshop in Switzerland when a party of six or seven English came in, and commenced talking and arguing about something—where they were to have met, I believe—in exceedingly loud, disagreeable tones, when the master of the shop came from his inner office in the greatest agitation to know what was the matter, the girl who was serving us answering in German, which she evidently thought we did not understand, that it was only some English people noisier than usual.

Our men, too, are often considered bombastic, impatient and fussy in the extreme, and though it is always put down to English haughtiness, experience has made it my firm conviction that in nine cases out of ten all this calling, shouting and fidgeting are really signs of nervousness, because the same gentlemen are not

at home in the language. Whenever I have seen those thoroughly well up in their modern languages I have invariably noticed that their behaviour was perfectly quiet, self-possessed and unassuming. 'Arry, however, makes himself heard all over the place, and growls to his heart's content under the very false impression that it is a sign of good breeding.

And now a word for our girls and their parents, indeed for boys too. Hundreds, nay thousands, are sent yearly to Germany, Switzerland and France for educational purposes. Some are placed in boarding schools, others in private families, and not a few are left to their own sweet will in large *pensions* frequented by all sexes and people of all nationalities. Having spent nearly two years in a great educational centre of this kind I cannot express my feelings at the culpable carelessness of many parents in leaving their children, particularly their girls, either in families or schools without making arrangements for them to be under proper control and sufficient chaperonage. The majority of our young people behave wonderfully well under very trying circumstances, but there are many and many things going on that parents never dream of, and which go a long way towards ruining our boys and girls.

Perhaps one of the first mistakes into which our girls and boys fall is that of getting into foreign habits on Sundays. They cannot refuse to do what their companions all do. At the outset they are too nervous to assert themselves. They are ashamed to tell their parents what they have done, and so a system of deceit is commenced which gradually leads to worse and worse. A young English girl, for instance, went quite lately to a German boarding school, and the first Sunday evening she was there she joined in an evening dance, simply for want of courage to say "no," and, unfortunately, that one act will be brought up time after time as an argument in favour of doing other things which are against her conscience and principles.

That parents ought to put all these matters on a sure footing before sending their children from home is a positive duty, but very many do not realize how differently even Protestant foreigners live to what we are accustomed to at home.

As for the young people themselves, their manner of starting will have everything almost to do with their future life. If they will only commence by resolutely living exactly as they would be required to do under their parents' roof, half the battle would be fought, for those of our English young people who do so—and they are very many—are respected and invariably honoured for their steadiness and consistent conduct.

That there is very much that is wrong cannot be denied. Children are led into folly from sheer fun and frolic at times, and in any case it is a dangerous experiment to leave our young people alone without sufficient protection and discipline. Several ex-

ceedingly sad and painful circumstances have been brought under my own notice, one very lately, which has caused much misery, and the breaking up of a whole household, and so I cannot too strongly beg of parents to have a thorough knowledge of where they place their children, and of the young people to be honest and true to their training, and not to slip into ways that they feel and know to be wrong.

To enumerate all the faults of manner and the mistakes into which we are apt to blunder would be as impossible as useless ; but we can surely cultivate that politeness which leads to kindly thoughts and acts, and by practising it when abroad strive to give foreigners so high an opinion of English women and girls at any rate that it will induce them to grant to their wives and daughters a similar position and equal privileges to those we enjoy.

JOSIAH BRINKMAN'S SECOND MARRIAGE.

By FRANCES SELOUS,

AUTHOR OF "A HAVEN OF GOLD," "NOT IN DEBBETT," ETC.

CHARLIE HARGREAVES and Blanche Hayward had been for two years fellow-actors in the company engaged at the new Bonbonnière Theatre, on the Embankment. He had been first walking gentleman; she, first walking lady. Neither showed any remarkable talent in their profession, but both were proficient in the mystic art of dressing. *Habités* of the stylish and popular Bonbonnière were wont to lay a great deal of stress upon the thoroughly good form of the theatre. The pieces produced were always good and in good taste, they were always successful, and the actors were all gentlemen, the actresses always ladies and always pretty, and the manager's wife, who was the leading lady, wore dresses which made one of Worth's best customers green with envy.

After Hargreaves and Blanche had walked through a good deal of delicate sentiment *on* the boards, and very refined lovemaking, they somehow or other *off* the boards drifted into a sort of intimacy which only fell short of an engagement. They had never talked of marriage, they were both so poor and Hargreaves so extravagant, his salary of five pounds per week barely supplied his humble bachelor wants; and Blanche was so fond of pretty bonnets and hot-house flowers, her four pounds per week was barely sufficient for her single requirements. Clearly a *ménage* was impossible. There was a sort of idea, hinted at more than once by Charlie in moments of unwonted tenderness, that if ever he got an opening, by Jove! they would go into management, and Blanche should come out in a piece with dresses that would startle even Mrs. Derwentwater, the manager's wife.

During the run of "Love in a Cottage," a sentimental drama, which had enjoyed a *succès fou* and threatened to run a thousand nights, Miss Blanche Hayward awoke to the fact that she, like the piece, had made a big hit. Josiah Brinkman, colonial merchant, middle-aged and a widower, had fallen in love with her. His admiration, which had at first expressed its ardour in bouquets and lavish extravagance in the matter of stalls, ultimately developed into a luncheon given at Richmond one Sunday to the whole cast of "Love in a Cottage," and culminated in an acquaintance with Miss Hayward's mamma and a habit of dropping in to afternoon

tea. Perhaps if Miss Hayward had cherished any serious liking for Mr. Hargreaves she might have hoped that the very demonstrative attentions of the rich merchant might have spurred on the dilatory youth to some more decided expressions upon the subject of matrimony, but, however this may have been, Mr. Hargreaves did not become more explicit; on the contrary he became vaguely bitter and Byronical and indulged to a great extent in very gentlemanly cynicism.

One evening as Hargreaves stood beside Blanche at the wing waiting for their entrance together in the second act, the call boy brought Miss Hayward a large parcel lightly covered with white paper.

"Ah," said Blanche coolly, with a swift glance at Hargreaves to note his expression; "the usual bouquet."

"As usual, from the elderly Adonis," said Hargreaves with his most cynical expression.

"He is not so very elderly," said Blanche pouting, "and *he* does not think himself an Adonis."

"That's sensible at any rate. I say, Blanche, though, how will all this end, don't you know? Luncheon at Richmond, bouquets, &c."

"All this, don't you know?" retorted Blanche, herself adopting the cynical tone, "will end in our wedding on the 22nd of next month at three o'clock at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, and to my being very pleased to see you at either or both of our 'at homes' on the first and second Tuesdays in June."

Blanche made this announcement triumphantly, but there was, nevertheless, noticeable in her countenance an eagerness to note its effect upon her companion and a corresponding look of disappointment as he calmly and frankly wished her joy.

"I congratulate you, Blanche. By Jove! you'll cut the stage, though, I suppose, and that will be rather a bore, because I believe you are happier on the stage than you'll ever be off. But I do sincerely congratulate you, and if you were kind you would wish that I might pick up some little heiress as easily as you have landed your big fish. I shall come to both your 'at homes,' though you will be such a very great lady you will soon vote your old friends disreputable."

Blanche gave a curious little side-glance at her companion; he was quite unmoved. Had their intimacy of the past been no more than idle philandering on his part? She had deceived herself certainly, and with a sudden change to the calm air which she meant to assume in the future as matron and possibly as a woman of fashion if she could manage it she dipped her nose into the bouquet of orchids and said as naturally as was possible:

"We shall be very pleased to see you, I am sure; recollect first and second Tuesdays, 4-7, at Lancaster Gate, corner house, facing the park."

Of course one of the chief stipulations in Mr. Josiah Brinkman's contract of marriage with Miss Blanche Hayward, of the Bonbonnière, was that she should bring her connection with the stage to an end. It would ill befit Mrs. Josiah Brinkman, wife of one of the wealthiest men in his particular line of business, to be earning a salary of a few pounds per week at any theatre however popular and *recherché*.

The two afternoon parties to be given in the beginning of June, at which Mr. Brinkman was to introduce his bride to his own acquaintance, formed a frequent subject of conversation during their somewhat unpoetical engagement. Mr. Brinkman meant the parties to be first rate; there would be plenty of his set who might think he had demeaned himself by marrying an actress, but he would show them how he could elevate his wife to his own superior station, and give a party that would astonish Wright, the wholesale druggist, his neighbour at Lancaster Gate, and Cooper, the rich accountant, who had lately purchased a nobleman's house in Park Lane. Blanche, on her side, intended that their two "at homes" should be really "smart." Of course Brinkman was dreadful, and would be a fearful dead-weight at any party, and no doubt Mrs. Derwentwater would make game of him to her friends and patronize Blanche openly; but nevertheless she thought it was quite possible that if she worked well she might contrive to give a party which should be mentioned in *Truth*, and which might be the forerunner of a long series of smart entertainments. She could fancy the paragraphs: "Mrs. Brinkman—always a delightful hostess—splendid rooms, so many elegant costumes, &c., &c." So both being bent on the same end, though with different views as to its attainment, the discussions during their short courtship were delightfully harmonious. Gunter of course was to be employed; Locksmith, the clever caricaturist, to be engaged for the afternoon: he was not a novelty, perhaps, and everybody has heard his entertainments, but then no one need listen, and people want something of that sort to set them talking fairly well; a clever girl-violinist, German, with long fair curls and a learned forehead; and Brinkman knew a baronet who owed him money, and would be obliged to come if he were asked in good time. Brinkman then handed his betrothed a list of his own friends to be invited, triumphantly exclaiming:

"There! I flatter myself there isn't a name down there that don't represent pair-horse carriage people, and most of them can boast his country house as well as town ditto, and now let's see your list."

Blanche shuddered; truly it would require a great deal of tact and talent to tone down this dreadful tradesman.

"You've got a good many actors and actresses down here, I see," said Brinkman, looking disparagingly at the list.

"Yes, but they are among the smartest. If you want our

parties to be succesful, you must have good—I mean clever people. Mrs. Derwentwater has been to a garden-party at Marlborough House, and so has Rafferty, the Irish poet, I mean to ask.”

This effectually silenced Brinkman. None of his people had crossed that sacred threshold.

There was one cloud in Blanche Hayward's otherwise serene sky, which resulted in so serious a quarrel as threatened almost to break off the engagement. This grew out of that perilous subject in second marriages—the widower's family of daughters. They were to be bridesmaids at the wedding, and the bride-elect had supposed that that festival over, they would return into the retirement of their finishing school at Earl's Court; but she was shocked to find that it was all otherwise—the fond father had determined to exhibit them at the two “at homes!” It was dreadful, those great gawky girls, five of them. Wouldn't five overgrown school-girls spoil any party? How could an “at home” have any pretensions to elegance while marred by the presence of those pudding young women?

Blanche tried reasoning, persuasion and artifice. The dear girls were not old enough, they were not out, they would be out of place at a grown-up party. They were hardly more than children in fact, dear Sophia was barely seventeen, and it would be really no kindness to withdraw her from school just now, when it was most important, &c. Brinkman was inexorable; they were not children, and he didn't know anything about out or not out, all he knew was that Sophy and Jane were both fine-grown young women, and both taller than Blanche.

When Blanche found it was impossible to influence this vulgar father with his plebeian paternal affection, she adopted the ground that it had only been for their own good she had wished them to remain at school, but that she was really pleased they were coming, and would like to go on the very next day and choose their dresses—she proposed worked muslin or something very simple and elegant. Mr. Brinkman might drive her to Regent Street in his carriage. But the next day brought a very acid note from Lydia, Miss Brinkman *par excellence* and whilom ruler of the Lancaster Gate mansion, who thanked her future step-mamma excessively for her *no doubt* (underlined) kindly meant interference, but begged to assure her that she was quite capable of choosing her own and her sisters' dresses for the “at homes,” and that her papa had not yet begun to grudge the expense of satin merveilleux or brocaded silk, and had not yet proposed *plain* muslin, however *elegant*, for his daughters' *best* dresses, whatever his other infatuations might in future lead him to. She remained, &c., Lydia Brinkman.

“Odious girl,” thought Blanche; “fancy admitting to the possession of a *best* dress! I suppose they will insist upon rustling about in silk dresses, and the eldest is not so old as I am! But I suppose they must be conciliated, so I shan't show this rude letter

to Josiah. Josiah! what a truly awful name! I wonder if it would be better for me to call him papa, as middle-class women call their husbands, and evade that dreadful 'Josiah!'"

The first Tuesday in June dawned prosperously for the wife of Josiah Brinkman, Esq. It was a warm sunshiny day, with just enough balmy breeze to flutter the lace curtains of the five long windows in the Lancaster Gate drawing-room.

The continental tour had been delightful. In the fulness of the bridegroom's heart he had taken his bride to only the best and most Anglified hotels, where Mrs. Brinkman had been invariably mistaken for the rich Englishman's daughter, and ardently courted as such by the dashing moustachioed foreign military men and those interesting poetical beings with foreign titles of nobility who haunt the best continental hotels in the hope of capturing by one *coup* an English bride and a fortune. The culminating bliss of this most successful honeymoon had been a visit to the *salons* of the renowned Worth on their return through Paris, when Mr. Brinkman made Blanche, in her own words, "too utterly happy," by the presentation of a visiting dress, a summer tea-gown and a dinner dress; this, on the top of the *trousseau* in a large measure paid for by the husband elect, seemed generosity more than princely.

At a quarter to four precisely Blanche came down into the drawing-room graceful and elegant in a filmy, gauzy confection of that exquisite and almost unattainable simplicity that the eye of the connoisseur immediately detects to be the production of the highest artist. The five lumpy daughters of the house of Brinkman were scattered about the room with stiff bouquets in their hands. They were dressed in costly silks and satins that made one hot to look at in the warm June afternoon, and their stout homely figures all looked older than their stepmother's.

"I say, girls," cried Janey, the youngest but one, "let's come and see ma's Paris dress."

Before Blanche could move she was surrounded by her five stepdaughters, eagerly scanning the gown which was to crush Mrs. Derwentwater.

"Why, I declare," said Lydia, "it's only plain muslin with little tucks and embroidery like a baby's robe, and yet it cost fifty guineas! Aren't you disappointed, ma?"

"Why, no; it's very simple and of course the materials very likely didn't cost five pounds, but then it is really elegant. Don't you think it looks nice?"

"It does make you look jolly, certainly," said Janey rather doubtfully. "Do you know, girls, I rather wish we had let ma choose *our* dresses."

Blanche was delighted; approbation wrung from these sworn enemies must herald admiration in other quarters.

Almost before the ormolu clock, from which Blanche, after a

desperate battle with her husband, had banished the glass shade, had struck four, the first rat-tat-tat at the door was heard. After an interval of a few minutes occupied by the Misses Brinkman in craning their necks round corners of the balcony in the hope of obtaining a glimpse of the over-punctual visitor, and before Janey had time to assure her sisters that it was a man with a white hand and long grey coat, the door opened and one of Gunter's well-bred men confidentially announced "Mr. 'Argreaves."

"How do you do, Mrs. Brinkman? You see I have taken you at your word and mean to come to both your parties. I came early because I want you to make use of me, we are such old friends, almost brother and sister to each other." Hargreaves emphasized this assertion with a slight pressure of the hand and one of the tender little looks which constituted his chief stock-in-trade in his profession and which rather seemed to belie the fraternal sentiments he laid claim to. "You are in quite a new world," with a glance at the step-daughters, "and I am sure a brother may be useful."

"Thank you very much; I shall remember your kind offer—and now let me introduce you to my daughters. Lydia, let me introduce Mr. Hargreaves, Miss Brinkman, Emily, Louisa, Jane, Sophia."

Hargreaves bowed to all five and then began to devote himself to the eldest. He wanted to become intimate with the rich merchant and his family, and he felt that to ingratiate himself with the eldest and plainest of the five plain young women was the best way to accomplish that end.

The rat-tat-tats increased until the knocker seemed never still; hot-looking bulky matrons and their overdressed daughters poured in; a few young men, very carefully dressed, very confident about their own appearance and general merits and rather supercilious towards all the overdressed young women who were *not* only daughters; and a few fat elderly white-waistcoated men, represented the Brinkman section. To all these Mr. Brinkman, radiant and very warm in his wedding garments, introduced his wife, whom they afterwards disparaged to their friends who were not at the entertainment, and talked of as "a chit tricked out in muslin and a professional actress, I am told, and not at all a suitable second choice for Josiah Brinkman, mark my words."

Blanche's friends arrived later and shocked many of the Brinkman circle by appearing to know and make much of Mr. Locksmith, the caricaturist—"A professional paid for the afternoon!"

Blanche, who recollected the buzz and roar of many voices at the smart "at homes" given by the wives of successful authors, actors, managers and others she had so much enjoyed in the past, felt a painful consciousness of the absence of noise. The rooms were nearly full, yet the hostess could distinctly hear the notes of the celebrated German violinist. Those rich commercial friends

of Brinkman's *would* not talk, and could a party be a success at which it was necessary to lower your voice before making disparaging remarks about your host, hostess and other guests?

Mrs. Houghton, famed for her wicked tongue and cleverly spiteful remarks, was quite silent; she would say plenty of good things about the party afterwards, no doubt, at the other houses she would be going to and would bring ridicule upon the house, but that was not what was wanted.

Quite late Mrs. Derwentwater arrived, bringing with her a distinguished *divorcée* who had become quite the fashion since by legal artifice she had outwitted her titled husband in his suit. She shook hands with Blanche, introduced the friend and moved on into the rooms. Blanche saw gold eye-glasses raised and a good deal of staring. Mrs. Derwentwater was recognized, that was a good thing; the presence of an actress who had been to a garden party at Marlborough House, and a fashionable *divorcée* must give *ton* to any reception. Mrs. Derwentwater moved through the drawing-rooms, nodded to Hargreaves, shook hands with Locksmith, and exactly seven minutes after her arrival came to say good-bye to her hostess.

"So soon, Mrs. Derwentwater," said Blanche; "won't you let Mr. Brinkman get you some tea or an ice downstairs?"

"No, dear, thank you very much. I must be going. We are already overdue at dear Lady Botherby's in Berkeley Square, but I was determined to come and see you and congratulate you. Such a charming man, Mr. Brinkman," said Mrs. Derwentwater, nodding her head in the direction of a short stout man in the doorway, under the mistaken impression that he was Mr. Brinkman, "and such dear girls, quite charming companions for you, I am sure. Good-bye dear," and Mrs. Derwentwater sailed out of the room and downstairs, and wafted on the summer air Blanche overheard such scraps of her remarks to her friend as "barbarous furniture—people that one has never seen anywhere, don't you know—and a relief to get off."

By a quarter to seven the last of the guests had departed and Blanche was able to sink down on to an ottoman and admit to herself that the reception had fallen far short of that standard of elegance which may aspire to be called smart. She knew this and knew that next week another herd of people would march into her house, devour refreshments and march out, and that neither entertainment would do anything more than enable Mr. Brinkman's acquaintance to shake their heads and augur no good of a man of his age marrying a theatrical.

The first result of the "at homes" was a flood of invitations to ponderous and dreary dinner parties and a series of equally ponderous dinners to be given in compensation. Blanche refrained from asking any of her former friends and acquaintance to these banquets. They would only laugh and make game of the enter-

tainment and it was quite possible that these commercial friends of Mr. Brinkman would consider themselves outraged if asked to meet actors or actresses of twice their education and information. The two first Tuesdays of the month continued to be held sacred as reception days, but only in that mild and feminine form of dissipation which consists in tea, new bonnets, the discussion of other people's daughters' chances, pet curates and domestic and infantine worries.

Three months of vulgar prosperity had seemed like three years to Blanche; she had drifted away from her former acquaintance. Many of them still asked her to their large and indiscriminate crushes, but no longer to the little luncheons to meet this or that celebrity, dinners at Richmond to fête that society poet or the other, or the dainty little parties during the earlier part of the season, when strawberries are hardly in and salmon not a dish for the economical materfamilias. She read the weekly journals and sighed over the accounts of balls, dinners and "at homes," and felt venomously disposed towards her former associates, whose names so often occurred, low down it is true, but still among the lists of guests at so many smart receptions. Blanche still read the *Era*, that Testament of actors, and made a point of taking her husband to the first performances of all the new pieces at the best theatres, and in her seat in the stalls she felt like a war horse scenting the fray from afar but chained up in his stable, what time his equine brethren are disporting themselves on the battlefield.

All this time Charlie Hargreaves was a constant dropper in on Sundays and on the two first Tuesdays. He came in late, about the time that other visitors were departing, and regaled Blanche with the latest rumours of the green room and the amusing *on dits* of the profession. He was very respectful and if a trifle sentimental contrived to combine sentimentality with an interesting pensiveness which was quite affecting.

"I am afraid Charlie really liked me more than I imagined," mused Blanche in thoughtful moments. "I am afraid I treated him very badly, getting engaged all in a hurry as I did without giving him an opportunity of declaring himself. I daresay his small salary made him reticent. Poor fellow, he is very nice, and I am glad he gets on with the girls; it is so nice to hear all about the profession now that I have retired."

If it was also nice to have an elegant young man hovering about her in constant attendance on her and who seemed prompted by the purest affection to make himself her slave, Blanche did not admit as much to herself even in the privacy of her own boudoir. After six months of married life and retirement from the stage Blanche felt that existence had become a burden almost too great for further patient endurance. She had managed to ingratiate herself with her step-daughters, who revered her for her taste in dressing and consulted her as an oracle upon all details of the

toilet. But their society weighed her down, they were so dull, so inartistic, so dreadfully Philistine, and Mr. Brinkman seemed to her daily more and more to assume the position of father and rather a grumpy father. He was very generous, gave her plenty of money, and allowed her a great deal of liberty, but she must in return provide for all his creature comforts and listen to and sympathize with the daily bulletins he issued concerning the state of his health, the slight chill he caught yesterday from which he was a "leetle" better to-day. She must be ever in her place to the moment at the seven o'clock dinner and must meekly endure his revilings and stormings if the fish was boiled too much, the meat hard or the vegetables cold. And when he asserted that there was a cabal to prevent him ever getting his vegetables at the right temperature, she must listen and assent without a smile. Very soon she began to think that perhaps she had committed a mistake. She had been over hasty in accepting the proposals of this rich man. She was too young to give up her profession; she should have remained upon the stage until youth and her good looks were on the wane and then it would have been good policy to marry and provide for her middle and latter age. But on the other hand perhaps when good looks were on the wane it might not be within her power to achieve the conquest of the rich man whom she had always looked upon as the natural protector of her future. And then her old friend and fellow actor of the Bonbonnière was always at hand regretting that she had left the stage, suggesting that it was a pity that one so gifted, &c., &c., should be buried in private life, and perpetually talking of the many openings there were on the stage for clever young actresses, if only backed by a man of substantial fortune and able to push them well to the front.

"Given a good play, my dear Mrs. Brinkman, a clever manager, an artistic stage manager—your leading actor could stage manage for you or at any rate direct a subordinate—and such a man as Brinkman to finance the concern, and you would make a fortune."

They were seated on the landing of Mrs. Derwentwater's house at one of that lady's large parties given towards the end of the season, parties given with a view to paying off easily and cheaply all small outstanding debts of hospitality and attention and which ill-assorted mobs formed Blanche's last link with the society she most approved.

Blanche had felt more than one pang of regret as she noted how much cooler had been her reception by her hostess and how much less the attention of other old acquaintances now that she came among them as Mrs. Brinkman, of Lancaster Gate, than had fallen to her lot formerly as Miss Hayward, of the Bonbonnière.

"Then do you really think I could get a good engagement if Mr. Brinkman were to let me try?"

"My dear Blanche—I mean Mrs. Brinkman; the other, though,

comes instinctively"—Hargreaves concentrated his whole genius on the production of a respectful and heartrending sigh eked out by the expression of tenderest melancholy—"my dear Mrs. Brinkman, why try for an engagement? Why not take that new theatre they are building in Leicester Square and produce a piece yourself?"

"With myself for leading lady? I always feel very confident of my power to win the audience if ever I had an opening, but do you really think I am good enough for leading lady?"

"Quite, my dear Blanche—only I should not recommend you to undertake so much at once; engage Ada Walters, the new American actress, for the first season say, and then when everything is fairly well *en train*, who would make a more attractive, more bewitching, more lovable leading lady than yourself?"

Blanche was touched and flattered. "If only Mr. Brinkman could be persuaded," she sighed.

"Let us try," said Hargreaves. "If you will only second me we ought to succeed."

Before the new theatre was upholstered Mr. Brinkman had been talked, argued, flattered and cajoled into signing an agreement to take it for three years. Not without difficulty had this been achieved. For a long time Mr. Josiah Brinkman had confined his share of the argument to the assertion that he knew how to invest his capital safely and soundly so as to bring him in good interest and he didn't mean to begin to make risky speculations now. Thus did Mr. Josiah Brinkman at first reject all propositions for him to subsidize the new theatre. But constant dropping wears away the hardest stone, and from hearing continually of this scheme for making money so easily, he began to think and talk about it in his leisure hours, and was considerably influenced by hearing that his friend Cooper, the accountant, had for years been the real, though not the nominal lessee of a West End theatre and an East End music-hall, and that he had furthermore made a good thing out of both. If Cooper, who was a shrewd fellow and nothing more, and not one whit a cleverer man of business than himself, had made money in that way, surely he Josiah Brinkman could manage equally well. And so by little and little he became at first reconciled to the idea of such a thing as being feasible and ultimately to treat of it as not impossible. Blanche's solicitations perhaps turned the balance. An elderly man who can resist a young wife's entreaties, prayers, and tears so early in his married life as the first six months, must indeed be made of adamant. Mr. Josiah Brinkman was not; he was obstinate and conservative in his ideas, but warm-hearted and where the influence of his fair young second wife was concerned inclined to be fatuous; he was also amenable to flattery and where his own ends were concerned Mr. Charlie Hargreaves did not scruple to administer large doses of that emollient.

Before the opening of Parliament in the year following his

marriage Mr. Josiah Brinkman found himself the lessee of the new Harlequin theatre, and early in February took his place in the stage-box to witness the first raising of the curtain of the new theatre ; his wife was to act one of the old order of *rôles* in the new play. Her dresses were known to have been made by Worth, and it was confidently hoped that they in conjunction with the real Chippendale furniture to be used in the piece, and the splendid acting of Miss Ada Walters the American comedienne would secure a certain success.

The piece, "The Happy Pair," was a success ; Miss Ada Walters' acting received enthusiastic notices in all the papers ; Mrs. Brinkman's performance was generally unnoticed, except by the critics of a few semi-theatrical weeklies, who went the length of dismissing her from notice with such damping remarks as *lay-figure*, unintelligent rendering, want of vivacity and absence of light and shade ; what praise they did mete her was awarded to the elegance of her costumes. Artistically she was a failure ; from a business point of view successful. The *Queen* devoted a column to the description of her gowns, and hundreds of that large class of females who consult that journal as an oracle booked seats for "The Happy Pair," that they might see and study and drill their own dress-makers into reproducing such perfection.

During the run of "The Happy Pair," Mr. Brinkman, who soon began to find his evenings dull without the young wife he had wedded in the hope of securing an amiable companion in his middle age, and skilful and obedient nurse in his old age, got into the habit of getting into a hansom after dinner and taking one or other of his daughters to the theatre, sometimes to see "The Happy Pair," sometimes to see some other play. In his position of lessee of the Harlequin, Josiah Brinkman had no difficulty in obtaining admission into any theatre ; and he felt a pleasing sense of importance as he handed his card to the box-keeper, certain of being immediately offered his choice of a seat in box or stalls ; on these occasions he felt the few thousands invested in the Harlequin not ill-spent. The society of a daughter of the school-girl age is often apt to pall upon the mature mind of a business man, and Josiah Brinkman fell also into the habit of going into the lobbies between the acts and of imbibing glasses of whisky and water at the refreshment bar and of getting into conversation with the other loungers and *habitués* of the theatre. From these he would hear the latest *on dits* of popular actors and actresses, and choice little scandals of behind the scenes in which it often happened that noble and even royal names were mentioned. He himself had been connected with the drama so short a time that there were few among these raffish and Bohemian theatre-goers who knew his appearance by sight, and thus it was that one evening between the acts of an unusually vapid opera bouffe that he had brought his youngest daughter to see, under the impression that that sort of play was the only fit one for the

juvenile feminine mind, he chanced upon a little knot of men standing by the refreshment bar very freely discussing the Harlequin, its management and himself.

"Rich old City buffer, alderman, or Lord Mayor, or something of that sort—only been married a few months—doesn't seem to mind all this philandering, perhaps he's rather sick of the fair Blanche already and wouldn't mind handing her over; perhaps he don't object to heavy damages. Can't say which."

When he heard the Christian name of his wife uttered by a coarse red-faced man in this familiar manner Mr. Josiah Brinkman winced. He had always thought he had done a risky thing in marrying a professional actress, he now began to fear he had done a foolish thing. He felt inclined to aim a blow at the red-faced man, but restrained himself and resolved to listen to what might follow. But there was silence for a moment. Miss Blanche Hayward was not sufficiently great an actress for her frailty to be a matter of general interest; no one seemed inclined to carry on the conversation. Josiah Brinkman braced himself up to ask a question. He was resolved to hear all that might be known.

"Ahem," he began, diffidently addressing the man who had spoken about his wife. "And who is it that philanders with Miss Blanche Hayward?"

"Who is it, man? Why, who should it be if not Charlie Hargreaves? He was engaged to her, don't you know, before her marriage and now he has got round old Brinkman, who has taken the Harlequin and has given him this engagement. Some people think Brinkman don't know anything about it, but I think he does; he can't be such a fool as not to. Why, they are always about together—professional *matinées*, private views of picture galleries, &c.; everybody knows how it will end: Sir James Hannen, £5,000 damages and our worthy Brinkman free as the birds of the air."

Mr. Brinkman thanked the talkative stranger and went slowly back to his seat in the stalls. So these people were talking about him and the behaviour of his wife. People said that Hargreaves had "got round" him. What a fool he had been to take a theatre and allow his wife to act again! He did not believe that his wife had behaved badly, he loved her and admired her and felt perfectly sure that she had lived in the dangerous atmosphere of a theatre without having been tainted. He thought it very likely that his wife had flirted with Hargreaves, but he did not think that she had done anything worse. One thing bothered him. That man had said that his wife had been engaged to Hargreaves at the time that he Brinkman had proposed to marry her. He hoped this was false; he had never heard any rumour of such a thing when first he knew her and she had positively told him that she had never been wooed in marriage before the unromantic widower had seen and courted her. However, he soon decided on his plan of action. He would see his wife directly she returned

with her maid from the theatre, he would demand an explanation of her conduct and in any case he would forbid her to act again. A substitute must be found for her part.

When the play was over, he drove home with his daughter. As soon as they entered the house, he bade the damsel good-night and told her to go to bed at once. He opened the door of the drawing-room, in which the lights had already been extinguished; the morning-room was equally dark and deserted. His daughters had gone to bed. It was well, he would rather that the explanation with his wife should take place without fear of interruption. He went down into the dining-room. The gas was lighted, the fire burned brightly, and some soup simmered in a small earthenware saucepan on a dainty copper trivet. This was the supper of the mistress of the house. Before very many minutes Josiah Brinkman heard a key turn in the front door and almost immediately Blanche came into the dining-room followed by the maid who acted as dresser and went to and from the theatre with her. Blanche was amazed to find her husband still up.

"I remained up because I want to speak to you. Foster, you can go, your mistress won't want you any more."

Blanche was still more amazed and looked a little frightened.

"What do you wish to say, Josiah?"

There was no answer for a few moments. Josiah Brinkman sat in a chair he had drawn up to the fire and glared into the glowing embers.

"What do I want to say? I want to say a great deal. What do you mean by flirting with that young Hargreaves? Do you think that I don't know that you go to *matinées*, as you call them, with him and that people look on you as inseparable and laugh at me for allowing it?"

Blanche looked very white and frightened and made no reply.

"You've got nothing to say, then, madam. Well, I *have*. You've acted at the Harlequin for the last time. To-morrow morning early I shall telegraph to the manager that you are ill and he must find a substitute. Your part is quite insignificant, it would not be difficult to find a girl to take it at shorter notice, and I forbid you to speak to that jackanapes of a Hargreaves any more. Do you hear? Now take your supper and go to bed."

Blanche had said nothing, but had seemed petrified with astonishment during this brusque address. It had taken her quite by surprise. She knew that people at the theatre had begun to talk about her, quite unjustly, as she had done nothing to deserve censure—as yet—but she had always supposed that her husband would have continued in his blissful state of ignorance until—well, until anything should happen to startle and enlighten him. However, in a very few moments she had braced up her energies and was able to answer, to argue, and ultimately to convince her husband. It was two a.m. by the time Josiah Brinkman turned out the lights and

went upstairs to bed, and by that time Blanche had wept, entreated, argued and coaxed him into allowing her to act just for the run of the piece, which was to be withdrawn at Easter, and after then she promised to leave the stage for ever, and, moreover, she promised that Hargreaves should no longer be allowed to visit in Lancaster Gate, and promised that she would have nothing more to do with Hargreaves than was required by the exigencies of the piece.

Blanche could not sleep that night; she lay perfectly still lest she should be discovered to be awake. She was thinking she had acted an unworthy part in promising not to speak to Charlie Hargreaves except so much as their acting together should necessitate. She felt too sure that once in his society she was absolutely unable to exercise all self-control. Those little murmurings of reproach that she had thrown him over so suddenly—for lately Hargreaves had contrived to let her know that at the very moment she announced her engagement to him, he had been on the point of asking her to join his struggling fortunes; learning, however, of the greater fortune of her last pretendant he had, as honour prompted him, retired from the field and schooled himself to congratulate her and with an aching heart conceal his disappointment—and a thousand sighs of regret and half suggestions of despair all led her to forget that the young man who accused her of desertion had in the course of the two years during which they had acted together, enjoyed every facility for declaring his devotion and that he had carefully avoided making any use of such opportunities. However, it is comparatively easy for a good-looking young man of the order known to young women as interesting, to blind the reason and cajole the understanding of any girl he may wish to captivate, and so it happened that a very few months after her marriage, Blanche had quite been talked into believing, first, that she had jilted Charlie Hargreaves, and, secondly, that that young man was still devotedly, madly in love with her.

After that scene in the dining-room when Josiah Brinkman accused her of flirtation, Blanche felt that she was undergoing a certain amount of surveillance that seemed to her unbearable. At all hours of the day Brinkman would come tearing home from the City in a hansom and ask to see her, and finding her in the morning-room with his daughters, reading a novel or last Sunday's *Era* or *Referee*, would tear back again to the City in the same hansom that had brought him; several times in a week Brinkman would suddenly appear behind the scenes at the Harlequin and make some lame excuse for having come there. In a short time the surveillance ceased, Brinkman being apparently satisfied of his wife's good conduct; and Blanche began gradually to forget that promise she had made not to have anything more to do with Charlie Hargreaves and she gradually fell into the way of wondering whether she had not been foolish in marrying so soon, and whether it was not a great pity that she had not trusted more in Har-

greaves' attachment. Somehow or other they had both so much in common between them. He liked Parma violets and tuberose for his button-hole, she loved to wear a *parure* of those flowers in the corsage of her evening dress, both liked the same perfume at a certain terribly expensive shop in Bond Street. He got his *suede* gloves in Paris; she occasionally treated herself to stockings and gloves from the Eden of millinery. At the same time Blanche was bound to confess that Josiah Brinkman had been very good to her. He had made her a handsome settlement and he allowed her to be absolute mistress in everything provided always that she did well and faithfully those little offices he required of her: dinner perfect and punctual, sympathy in his imaginary microscopic ailments, &c., &c. Perhaps if she had never known that good-looking, elegant Charlie Hargreaves, she might have been quite happy with Mr. Brinkman.

It may seem strange that a young woman of twenty-three, who has for five years supported herself and in part supported her mother, should know so little of the masculine ways of the world as not to be able to distinguish between real, genuine love-making and love-making *pour passer le temps*. Charlie Hargreaves had succeeded in making Blanche Brinkman believe that he idolized her and only knew peace and happiness in her dear society. How many other young women he had impressed with the same belief was only known to himself and the inherited instinct called conscience.

Blanche grew more and more unhappy. She did not rejoice in a high order of mind, and as is the case with many of her profession, was more richly endowed with the emotional qualities than with the intellectual. Mr. Brinkman's kindness to her took the shape of a reproach, and she felt that her present life was a deceit. It was on one evening towards the end of Lent, very shortly before the withdrawal of the piece, that Blanche resolved to remain no longer the mistress of the house in Lancaster Gate. Hargreaves had lately become more and more Byronic and Swinburnian in his self-accusations, it being very much the habit of young men of a certain amount of good looks, cultivation and vanity to lay claim to a far greater depth of wickedness than they either possess the strength or the weakness of mind to be capable of. He had also made so many touching allusions to being bound in honour to the man at whose hand he received so much favour that Blanche felt quite assured that once removed from the man of whose kindness Hargreaves had so feeling a recognition, those proposals towards which everything had seemed lately to point would be too joyfully made. After a large amount of hesitation, inward debatings, infirmities of purpose, Blanche was at last resolved. Marriage, as Charlie had often said, was a fetter too gross for minds of so lofty a nature as his and hers—a poetical union could alone ensure their happiness. Blanche knew of many poetical unions in the

theatrical world, looked askance at by Mrs. Grundy and the mass, which she felt quite sure could set a pattern to many more duly executed ceremonials.

Accordingly, after a world of deciding and undeciding, resolving and doubting, Blanche packed up a few dresses and all the money she possessed in a portmanteau, which she sent by her maid to the theatre, and then sat down to explain her conduct to her husband. She made a packet of all the jewellery he had given her after the approved manner of runaway wives—there seems to be an etiquette even in running away—and then began her letter. She had always meant to do her duty; found too late she loved another, devotedly, despairingly, &c., &c.; she left him because thoughts of that other came between her and her husband, &c.; would he kindly forget her entirely, and if ever, &c., her conduct should waver from the hard lines that artistic minds felt to be so narrow and constrained, would he do her the justice to believe that when she wrote she was at least in act if not in thought his faithful wife. This she sealed in an envelope, directed and placed in a conspicuous position in the hall. Her husband was going to a civic gorge and would not be home before ten; he would see it then after she had left the house. This done, Blanche roamed about the house feeling rather melancholy; she had latterly worked herself into a romantic and sentimental state of mind, which seemed to demand this step she contemplated taking. She would go and live with her mother, seek an engagement at another theatre, and if Charlie seemed still as devoted as ever, well, she almost felt that it would be heroic to throw everything away for *his* sake.

In her anxiety to leave home without seeing her step-daughters Blanche left earlier than usual. The hall door closed with an ominous bang as she shut it for the last time. When she reached the theatre the piece had only just begun, and she did not come on until the second act. She felt nervous and unable to occupy herself, so she dressed and went into the green-room, thinking that she might see some one there and be able to talk and distract herself. The green-room at first seemed empty, but there was a large fourfold screen in front of the fire and presently Blanche gathered that there were two men standing behind it with their backs to the fire talking. They were talking in an undertone and had not heard her entrance. She hardly ever went into the green-room and half thought she had better go and wait in her dressing-room when her own name pronounced by one of the men behind the screen suddenly arrested her attention. It was hardly in human nature not to listen. She listened.

"I am told you are quite devoted to this little Mrs. Brinkman, shadow her about, in fact, as the Irish members say," said one of the voices behind the screen.

"So you have heard it, have you?" said the other, and to Blanche's amazement the voice belonged to Charlie Hargreaves.

"Yes, she is a good little thing, certainly, but deuced sentimental, and always requires a large amount of gush."

"Ah, then, there is nothing serious on your side?"

"Nothing whatever, my dear fellow," said Charlie coolly; "but it's always as well to be *au mieux* with a manager's or capitalist's wife, and you see any *petits soins* I may have lavished upon the fair Blanche have borne very good fruit. I owe this present engagement entirely to her infatuation."

There was a laugh behind the scene—the cold, careless, cynical laugh of two young men at a woman's expense.

Blanche rushed out of the room. Her infatuation indeed! Her eyes were opened. She went to her dressing-room, called her maid and bade her take a hansom and give the man extra money to drive his fastest to Lancaster Gate. She was to get the letter that she would find in the hall addressed to her master, and then return, also as quickly as possible. Blanche looked at her watch—a quarter past nine. Foster might, if she got a good cab, reach Lancaster Gate within the half hour, and she did not think that her husband would be home so early. If he had not already seen that letter she would be able to return home and assure her husband he had nothing to fear from any rival. Her infatuation! She wondered how she could ever have thought Charlie Hargreaves good! very soon she wondered that she had ever thought him good-looking, and before the end of their scene in the second act she felt sure that she hated him and could not believe that she had ever liked him at all.

It must be at least an hour before Foster could return either with or without the letter. Blanche felt that hour to be interminable. Added to her feelings of gratitude to the really good-hearted Brinkman she felt a sudden revulsion of feeling in his favour. He at least admired her and loved her, and would never wound her vanity by daring to talk of her infatuation should the letter have been found and read. Added to the grievous fact of her having sacrificed all claim to her husband's affection she would have to endure the humiliating knowledge that between two stools she had fallen very thoroughly to the ground. One thing was fortunate, and that was she had made no mention of Hargreaves; in confessing that at the time she wrote she loved another she had not written any name.

Within the hour Foster was back, and to Blanche's delight she had a letter in her hand, but her pleasure was shortlived—the letter was addressed to herself in her husband's hand. He had returned home earlier than she had anticipated and had read her letter, and acting on the information contained in it had resolved to leave London immediately with his daughters. He should later on consider if he should take any steps to procure a divorce against the woman who had disgraced him.

A divorce! Blanche had never thought of such a thing. Even

when she had meditated that poetical union which seemed so beautiful, she had not realized the harsh construction put on such unions by the world. But she had done nothing to deserve a divorce, thank heavens! Perhaps if she were to write and confess everything to her husband he would forgive her and take her back into that Philistine home she had so stupidly despised. But on returning to the letter she found that it would not be so easy to make a confession. Her husband in his letter went on to state that he was leaving England in order to sever all connection with his faithless wife, that he purposely left no address to which letters might be forwarded, and that on his return, should any letters arrive in Blanche's handwriting, they should all be sent back unopened.

This seemed conclusive. Blanche felt almost stupefied. It was some time before she could collect her thoughts sufficiently to consider how she should act. She had already arranged to stay with her mother, so she would drive there with her maid after the performance. In the morning she would dismiss Foster—in her present position she could not afford the luxury of a maid. As a matter of fact she was entitled to the money secured to her by her marriage settlement, but she in her ignorance supposed that having left her husband she had forfeited her right to the money. During the morning also she would plead ill-health and throw up her engagement at the Harlequin—at any rate her husband should not be led to suppose that she had left him for love of that coxcomb at the theatre. After a week's rest she would try and procure an engagement either at some other London theatre or in the provinces.

Blanche found some difficulty in obtaining an engagement at any of the fashionable theatres, and after six weeks' enforced idleness was fain to accept a small part in a melodrama to be produced at a house sacred to the school of blood and thunder. The smaller salary which Blanche had been fain to accept necessitated her living very carefully, and she had a general feeling of having made a failure of existence and of not wishing to encounter any of her old friends, that kept her rather a prisoner in her mother's small lodgings, more handsomely furnished, it is true, than before her marriage, but miserably small after the large rooms at Lancaster Gate. Blanche devoted a great portion of her time to wondering what was happening in her house. Were the girls pleased to have her gone and reign in her place? Did Lydia study her father's whims and comfort better than his wife had? and was he, therefore, also pleased that she had gone? Blanche could not admit to herself that she felt for her husband any feeling so romantic as love, but she certainly missed him a great deal. He was dreadfully old and uninteresting and plebeian, of course, but he had been always kind to her, and at any rate *he* believed her beautiful and a genius. For some time after she left her husband she was con-

scious of the presence of two rather shabby individuals who often hovered in the neighbourhood of her lodgings for days together, and often appeared mysteriously at the stage door, and sometimes were to be seen in converse with the custodian of that dingy portal. These she guessed to be detectives employed by her husband to obtain evidence for a divorce, and she rejoiced in her heart to think how fruitless was their quest. These shadows soon vanished, and one evening Blanche saw among the occupants of the stalls her husband. He looked worn and anxious, Blanche thought, and she wondered if it was on her account, and if he would ever forgive her and take her back into his confidence. Several times Blanche saw that same face in the stalls, but still there were no signs of relenting. Mr. Brinkman must know where to find her. The detectives, if those shabby beings were detectives, knew where she lived, and Mr. Brinkman could always find out her address at the theatre.

One day late in the autumn, as Blanche and her mother sat over the fire taking tea and chatting in that cosy half hour before Blanche must start for the theatre, there was a knock at the door, and the landlady's shabby maid-servant announced, "Miss Brinkman, if you please."

Before Blanche could recover from her astonishment Lydia came across the room, and shook hands awkwardly enough with Mrs. Hayward and then with Blanche. Mrs. Hayward told her to be seated, and Lydia sat down on the edge of a chair, and without looking at her step-mother asked her how she was and how she liked the new piece she was acting in. After the proper reply had been made the conversation languished. Blanche looked wonderingly at Lydia. Had she come here of her own free will, or had she been sent? Had she come to tender the olive-branch? Lydia looked all about the room, at the photographs on the mantelshef, at the cat purring on the hearthrug, at Mrs. Hayward's knitting—anywhere but at her step-mother's face. Presently she said in short jerky sentences:

"We have been on the Continent. All of us. Pa meant to stay a year. He felt lonely, though, so we all came back. Pa expected a letter from you."

"Did he?" said Blanche very slowly. "I should have written, but he told me not to."

"I know; he said he did. He was angry at first. He isn't now. May he come and see you?"

Before Blanche could answer Lydia got up hurriedly, and muttering something about other calls and good-bye for the present, left the room and went down stairs. Blanche was astonished, pleased and alarmed in turns. Would Mr. Brinkman forgive her? She would behave much better for the future. She would never act again, but would accommodate herself to his manner of existence. After all it wouldn't be so bad. Mr. Brinkman would

take her on the Continent every year, perhaps; the girls had all got to like her, and if only she had never listened to the perpetual insinuations of that man——.

Before she could frame the thought in her mind the door opened to admit Mr. Brinkman.

"Blanche," he said, "I've come to make up and be friends, if you will let me. When I read your letter I made up my mind you were going to run away with that puppy Hargreaves, and I don't mind saying I had you watched. But I know how quietly you have lived, and I know how you threw up your engagement at the Harlequin the very day after you wrote. It is very likely you did love or think you loved somebody else then, but I don't think you do now, do you, Blanche?"

Blanche could only shake her head and hide her brimming eyes on her husband's shoulder.

Reconciliation was short and easy, and confession soon made and soon followed by absolution. Blanche threw up her part in the melodrama, and returned to the life she had erewhile despised, and in the absence of the tempter, who had repeatedly called in Lancaster Gate and had always been denied admission, and felt himself an aggrieved person, never having fathomed the reason why Blanche had so suddenly ceased to act at the Harlequin and had ceased to be seen at *matinées* or at any of the chosen haunts of actors and actresses.

Before long a much coveted son and heir made its appearance in the Brinkman family; and in the first transport of paternal pride I am afraid that Mr. Josiah Brinkman began to hold quite cheap the five fair daughters of his house and heart when weighed in the balance with this small, wrinkled, purple thing wrapped in expensive muslins and fine lace, which was exhibited to him as his son. Blanche was a very devoted and, if it must be confessed, doting mother. Never had a baby shown intelligence at so early an age, never had a round doughy mass in robes held such promise of future beauty and good looks. And only when the vicar of their parish, in the furtherance of his charitable or architectural schemes, instituted fancy fairs and dramatic performances, did Mrs. Brinkman emerge from her retirement and successfully prove to the charitable and admiring audiences how far superior is the acting of a third or fourth rate professional actress to the wildest flights of genius of our most talented or titled amateurs.

SPECIMENS OF SPORTSMEN.

By J. MORAY BROWN,

AUTHOR OF "SHIKAR SKETCHES," "POWDER, SPUR AND SPEAR," AND JOINT AUTHOR OF
"VIOLET VIVIAN, M.F.H."

HAVING lately been perusing with much interest a series of articles and letters in *Shooting*, on the subject of what constitutes sport, some peculiarities of men calling themselves sportsmen, and to a certain extent being so, have floated across my memory. What constitutes "sport" is a difficult matter to delineate, and I fail to see that any hard and fast rule on the point can be laid down. Every man has his own idea on the subject, and it is not for me to attempt a task that men with greater experience and far greater abilities than I possess have failed to do with universal satisfaction. Personally, my idea of sport in shooting lies in the simple lines of working for, circumventing and killing your game in a fair way. No pot shots on the ground or other poaching dodges, *bien entendu*. If asked to define what I considered a *really enjoyable* day's sport at home, in shooting, I should word my reply much as this, "Give me a bit of ground, the rougher and more varied in character the better; let me go alone or with one other gun whom I can depend on, with my own dogs; let me go when I like and work it my own way, and then let me do my best to get a good mixed bag, comprising, if it is to be perfect, grouse, pheasants, partridges, hares, duck, teal, snipe, rabbits, plover and perhaps a woodcock." This would be *my* ideal. I may, perhaps, lay myself open to the retort that places where such bags can be obtained are few and far between. Granted they are, but still I know several places where they can be made, nay, even more, where I have made them myself. But let this pass. As I said before, I have no intention here of entering into a disquisition on what is sport or the reverse. The task I have set myself is merely to describe some men who aspire to be called and thought sportsmen, and who in reality are not so; of course, though, the final "specimen" in this article does not belong to this class, *cela va sans dire*. If any who read these lines should find the cap fit, and deem that I have from any motive, ill-natured or otherwise, held them individually up to ridicule in print, I beg they will disabuse themselves of the idea. I have no intention of being personal or hurting *any one's* feelings, and these sketches are merely drawn

from peculiarities I have noticed among men with whom I have been brought in contact during a good many years, and who otherwise were, many of them, the best of fellows. I daresay that some who read these lines will on doing so exclaim, "By Jove! that's so and so." Nothing of the sort, my friends. As I said before, these sketches are mainly fictitious, with just a substratum of truth pervading them, so that they should not be entirely imaginary. When I have mentioned an incident as occurring I have been careful to hide as much as possible the identity of the chief actor and the locality, so as to avoid wounding any susceptibilities, and these lines are merely penned in the hopes that those whose consciences smite them as coming under the various headings may take warning and apply to themselves the old Grecian axiom, "*Gnothi seauton*," and thereby cause their company in the field to be a pleasure instead of a nuisance to the friends and companions with whom they are associated. With this preamble and apology I will proceed to describe, under the name of Mr. Johnson—of course a fictitious one like all others in this article—the jealous sportsman.

THE JEALOUS SPORTSMAN.

WHO does not know this individual, and who that has been obliged to spend hours in his company has not over and over wished him at the bottom of the sea, instead of on the particular foot of land he was occupying? Mr. Johnson was a very good fellow in every sense of the word, *except* as a sportsman; good-looking, gentlemanly and with a fund of anecdote, he was welcome everywhere but in the field. Here, supposing the guns were walking in line, he would blaze away at everything directly it rose, utterly regardless as to whether the shot really belonged to himself, or to his right or left hand neighbour. In his keenness to score a kill he often, 'tis true, missed altogether; but when he did not his game was so mauled, so smashed up as to be useless for anything but the ferrets. It did not matter if it was a partridge, a rabbit, hare, or a pheasant fluttering up through thick undergrowth; before it had gone ten yards, "bang, bang!" went Johnson's both barrels, regardless of dogs, beaters or brother sportsmen. If Mr. Johnson was shooting over dogs and they were "standing" he recked not where the other gun was but hurried up best pace to get first shot, and his hurry and *empressement* to obtain this advantage bordered often on the ridiculous. Then he was always scheming to get the best place, or what he thought was the best place. In a grouse drive he would spend valuable moments arguing as to what butt *he* should be in. We will suppose there were seven guns out, and the places were drawn for; No. one being on the right of the line, and it had been agreed that each gun was to move *up* two places each drive. Johnson

had drawn No. six, *ergo*, next drive he would be No. one. He imagined No. four to be the best butt, and in his anxiety to secure it, argued that the numbers should move in the reverse order so as to place him in the position he desired, and when he failed to convince his hearers, got very angry, not to say sulky. Then it was the same story walking in line across turnips. He was always manœuvring to get a middle place where he thought he would have less walking and more shooting. If he was told off to a place and saw his neighbours getting more shooting than himself, he would take the first opportunity of (quite unintentionally of course) thrusting himself into that individual position in the line that recommended itself to his fancy. At a covert shoot it was as good as a play to observe him as he watched his host telling off the guns. If so many guns were wanted with the beaters he would, as far as possible, linger behind on some pretext, his "boot-lace wants tying up," or he "can't find that stupid fellow who is carrying his cartridges," &c. By this little dodge he fondly imagined he would be sent on in front. Then when he got there, as to letting pheasants rise, or not firing at one that will give a neighbour a more sporting shot than it affords him, why, he never dreamt of it. His one and only aim is to *kill*, no matter how; he fires right across the line, runs hither and thither in hopes of getting a shot *before* some one else. If he is grouse driving and has a retriever of his own with him, he will claim every bird the dog brings him, regardless of the fact that he has not killed it. N.B.—The jealous sportsman is very fond of this trick. I once saw a man of this type well served out. (We will, with your permission, still adhere to the nomenclature and call him Mr. Johnson.) We had been shooting partridges and a few outlying pheasants, and as the day wore on, the other guns, five in number, became curter and curter in their conversation with Mr. J——, for he had been at his old games and exhausted every one's patience, and deep and muttered were the anathemas showered on his head. At last one man, a real good sportsman, went up to our host and said, "Look here, old man, I can't stand that fellow any more; either he goes home, or I do; here he has been the whole day taking every one of my shots, and in that last field he nearly blew my toes off firing at a rabbit." Now the speaker was too good a shot to have *his* services dispensed with, for we were nearing the cream of our shooting, some fifty acres of rough ground and heather, into which a good many coveys had been driven. Neither did our host wish to offend Johnson, who was really a good fellow; so by a pardonable ruse he did his best to satisfy both parties and pour oil on the troubled waters. We had just beaten a little spinney and some fields distant to its right lay another thin strip of young larches, well away from the broken ground.

Preparatory to moving on to this, our host turned to Johnson, who in spite of all his scheming had *not* been a forward gun this

time, and said, "By Jove! old fellow, what a pity you were not outside! You might have got a shot at that woodcock."

"Woodcock! No, you don't say so. Where did he go?" asked Johnson eagerly.

"Oh, just over into that little spinney," was the careless reply. "Would you like to go and try for him? It's only a small place, and one gun can work it."

"Oh, yes! I'll go," said Johnson, jumping with avidity at the prospect of securing the first cock of the season (it was early in October).

"All right," was the rejoinder. "Here, you and you" (calling up two of the beaters) "go with this gentleman, and beat out that spinney; and mind you beat it *very* carefully, backwards and forwards, and *don't be in too great a hurry*, for cock lie very close in that stuff."

So off went Johnson in high feather, congratulating himself that his would be the honour of claiming the first woodcock of the season.

Needless to say, the bird in question was purely mythical. We others in the meantime went on as quickly as possible to the rough ground and had real good fun, getting some twenty-two brace of partridges, a couple of snipe and a few hares out of it, undisturbed by our jealous friend, who after about three-quarters of an hour rejoined us with a very long face, saying, "the place held nothing but a beastly rabbit," and though he had tried every inch he couldn't flush the cock! When he heard what good sport we had had during his self-imposed absence he was not better pleased, nor did even our host's regret and hazarded expression that "the cock must have skimmed on" reassure him, Anyhow he got well served out, and next day, thank goodness, he left the house and we were able to take our pleasure, which we had hitherto *moult tristement*, without having it spoilt by the jealous sportsman.

THE SWAGGERING SPORTSMAN.

THE swaggering sportsman, Captain Brabazon Bump, is a gentleman of a very different sort. Nothing is ever good enough for him. No matter what pains you take to show him sport he always cries it down; tells you your ground must be awfully poached, that your method of beating it is all wrong, that your keepers are either slack or a set of rascals, &c., in fact finds fault with everything. He talks very big about his shoots with Lord So-and-So and the Marquis of Dash, and gives you to understand that he is doing you a great favour by condescending to shoot the modest quantity of game you provide for his amusement. The night of his arrival, when the prospects of the morrow's sport are being discussed, he will probably inquire what sort of a bag will be made. If it is to be partridge shooting nothing under fifty or sixty brace

to four guns will satisfy him, whilst if it is to be covert shooting he will intimate that a bag of anything less than a thousand head will not meet with his approval. He brings down a perfect armoury of guns with him, and talks in the most learned manner regarding the respective merits of cylinders and chokebores; Schultze, E.C. and black powder; size of shot and loads; and will even dip into the question of "Cast off in guns." He has an irreproachable gentleman's gentleman with him, who quite dazzles you by his faultless get up when accompanying his master as loader. The swaggering sportsman disdains the humble pipe, only smoking the most costly "regalias," and glares with a supercilious air at any other brother sportsman who ventures on the more modest method of consuming tobacco, and if he spots a keeper committing such a heinous offence as smoking in his august presence he will be pretty sure to pass the most severe remarks thereon. To hear him talk one would think there was never such a shot as he is. To cut down sky high rocketers and bowl over hares at 100 yards seems to be mere child's play to him, and yet at the end of the day the share of the bag that he can honestly be credited with is generally of the very smallest proportions. Yet, withal he will, when it suits him, assume an air of humility which he is far from feeling. He will ask you to come and shoot with him at his "little place" (which, by-the-by, he *rents*) and assist in slaying the few hundred pheasants he has reared. He generally wears the loudest patterned tweeds as a shooting suit; has a belt hung all round with implements of the chase and otherwise: knife (a regular *multum in parvo* of a cutler's shop), cartridge extractor, cigarette case (silver of course), light ditto, and all sorts of fal-lals in fact. His fingers are seen to be plentifully bedizened with rings when he condescends to remove a pair of brand new white kid gloves, in which he always shoots. He has a great dislike to wet and mud, and votes it better fun to sit at the end of a covert on the portable walking-stick seat which his valet carries (when master is not using it), to tramping through deep heather or turnips up to his knees. Driving birds he looks on as the highest form of sport, though he can seldom hit them. Dogs, as an adjunct to sport, he deems quite unnecessary, and if kept waiting a moment whilst a wounded bird is being searched for he fusses and fumes at the delay, vowing the whole day's sport will be spoilt in consequence. Ever ready to hold up to ridicule the faults and failings of others, he is yet totally blind to his own defects. He is constantly drawing attention to his own performances, and his exclamation of, "I say, wasn't that a quick, or a long shot?" is sure to greet you should he perform either of those feats. In spite of all his bombast, Captain Bump is a "mean cuss" and of the stingy order, for if he can by any possible means avoid tipping a keeper, he will do so "on principle, sir," as he tells you. Altogether the swaggering sportsman is very objec-

tionable, and a decided snob, whose room is infinitely preferable to his company. Here is an anecdote about Captain Brabazon Bump, who, I must tell you, belonged to the 120th Bombay Budmashes and was home on two years' furlough. He was staying at Mr. —'s, where the shooting was decidedly above the average as far as variety and good bags were concerned. It was not, however, good enough for the gallant captain, and during his stay he had well nigh exhausted the patience of his host and fellow guests, and had been voted by men and women alike an insufferable nuisance. He put every one to rights on every topic that might be broached; talked very big about what he had done elsewhere, and was really quite Munchausen-like when he touched on Indian sport, and his feats in that line would have outrivalled the celebrated baron himself. Tigers he had shot by the score, and always *just behind the shoulder*; he was very particular on this point. Boars he had speared by the hundred, whilst as for deer, bears and small game, such hecatombs had fallen to his unerring aim that he had lost all count of them. On the evening in question the men had retired early to the smoking-room, and Captain Bump had no sooner got a big regalia under weigh than he broke forth in a perfect torrent of reminiscences. During the relation of these the butler entered and said something to his master in a low tone, who immediately left the room. After an absence of some twenty minutes he returned, accompanied by a small insignificant-looking man, dressed in a plain dark grey suit of tweeds, and whose features were somewhat concealed by a heavy beard and moustache. This person he introduced somewhat inaudibly as Mr. — to the assembled guests, saying he had just arrived by the last train. All the other men rose and greeted the new-comer pleasantly, remarking on the coldness of the evening, his long journey, &c. Capt. Bump, however, contented himself with according a patronizing nod and "How d'ye do" to the stranger from the depths of his arm-chair, and then proceeded with the adventure he was relating. It was all about a celebrated man-eating tiger, the terror of the district, which the gallant captain had, as he asserted, alone and unaided tracked to his lair and shot on foot. He was in the midst of describing how the infuriated monster had charged him, how the whole country had worshipped him as their deliverer and how he had got a large reward from Government for slaying the redoubtable animal, &c., when the stranger, who had been watching him intently with an amused smile on his lips, interrupted by saying:

"Excuse me for asking, but where and when did all this happen?"

The captain turned on him savagely:

"Do you doubt my word, sir? Well, if you want to know, three years ago in the Jootpore district—not that I suppose you know where that is," he added in a sneering tone.

"Well, I ought to," was the quiet rejoinder. "But tell me, was it anywhere near the village of Dhigaon?"

At the mention of this place the captain's face flushed, and he strove to hide his confusion by busying himself with mixing a brandy and soda. He replied, however, with a stammer:

"Eh? Well—well—yes—yes—not far from there."

"Ah!" replied the stranger. "I thought so; and you must be the Captain Bump who *poisoned* a tiger there about that time, and sent in a claim for *shooting* a man-eating tiger to the deputy commissioner's office. It may save complications if I tell you that *I* was the deputy commissioner, and wished you *anywhere* for what you did, for I was going after that very tiger myself, having had him marked down for some time. You were *mistaken* in *supposing* he was a man-eater, for he was a most inoffensive animal, and seldom even killed village cattle. But it was a *pity* you *poisoned him*! Anyhow, from investigations I made on the spot I was obliged to demur to your claim for killing a *man-eater*, as I could get no evidence to prove the animal ever had a human life laid to his charge."

Captain Bump's face was a study. He never said a word, but gulped down his B. and S. and left the room forthwith, and the next morning the breakfast-table knew him not. Only a note did he leave saying he was obliged to depart by the early morning train on "pressing business!"

Needless to say, his absence was not regretted, and all the party deemed themselves well rid of the swaggering sportsman!

THE STUPID SPORTSMAN.

THE stupid sportsman, whom we will dub the Honourable Adolphus Fitzfoozle, is a decidedly aggravating animal. He is always doing something foolish—and his stupidity is oftentimes more annoying than the sins of his jealous or swaggering brethren. His very look betokens inanity, and that hair the colour of tow and those boiled-gooseberry looking eyes tell almost plainly that the man has no real soul for sport. His figure too, verging on obesity, and his great flat feet show that he would be more at home lolling in the depths of an arm-chair than plodding through turnips, or up to his knees in heather, breasting a steep brae in Bonnie Scotland. He means well, however, and like most stupid people is very good-natured, but unfortunately he has the happy, or rather unhappy, knack of always doing and saying the wrong thing at the wrong moment. He invariably arrives late at the place of meeting, and keeps every one kicking their heels with impatience till he arrives. Then when he does put in an appearance, he generally carries his gun at full cock, and in such a position as to afford all his companions an opportunity of minutely scrutinizing the interior mechanism of its barrels! Then he displays the most utter cal-

lousness and disregard of possible accident by getting over a fence with his gun loaded. If walking in line he is generally some yards either behind or in front of the line, and when he ought to be loaded, ten to one he is not. Standing by a covert side should he chance to have a loader or companion of any sort beside him, he will keep up a constant strain of chatter, thereby not only spoiling his own sport by turning game back, but that of the guns on his right and left. Asked to shoot at a place where former experience tells him he will require at least a couple of hundred cartridges, he will arrive with only about fifty. The fact that he has brought too few does not seem to dawn on him till about the time when the cream of the shooting is to begin. Then what a to-do there is! Every one is applied to to lend him some cartridges (which, by-the-by, he generally forgets to repay!). The beaters must be stopped till Mr. Fitzfoozle's man goes back to his host's gun room for some more, and so on—of course all this is intensely pleasing to his fellow-guests, who are thirsting for the fray! Or take a grouse drive. We will suppose the moor is a pretty flat one, and one that requires a good deal of manœuvring to bring the birds over the butts well. We will further suppose that the state of the sky evidences a tendency to wet. Mr. Fitzfoozle will arrive at the trysting place in garments which, though of faultless cut and material, are from their colour more adapted for boating or lawn tennis in summer than the moor, the said garments being of the very lightest shade of nondescript whitish grey. At last, having ascertained that he has got his guns, his loader, his cartridges, his walking-stick seat (which the Honourable always carries), his host places him with strict injunctions to "keep down out of sight." The drive begins, and so does a shower. Thereupon the Honourable dons a *white* mackintosh, and stands well up in his butt, making himself a conspicuous object in the landscape, and scaring every bird away from his own butt and those nearest to him—much to their occupants' disgust and annoyance. If some birds, either bolder or more unwary than their fellows, should face his butt and give him the chance of a shot, he is generally so slow that he lets them get behind him before firing, which he does when the bird or birds are probably some two hundred yards away. If out with you for a rough shoot where you have to work for your game, the Honourable will probably moon along in a nonchalant manner with his thoughts anywhere but where they ought to be. As to thinking of diverging from his path to try yon patch of thick stubble that has been left standing up conspicuous in the bare shaven field, where a bit of twisted wind-blown corn has defied the reaping machine; that tussocky bit of grass that suggests a hare or rabbit may be squatting beneath it; a bit of marshy ground likely to hold a snipe, or any of the gamey looking spots an observant sportsman would spot at once—why, it never enters his head. So on he plods, like the ploughman "wending his weary way," and

is much astonished that his companion, who has his wits about him, should have half-a-dozen shots to his one! And now to conclude with an anecdote regarding our friend Fitzfoozle.

I was out with him after duck one day, and had marked a good lot of widgeon down on the river. They were, however, in an awkward place to get at, and the only way of approaching them was by crawling for some hundred and fifty yards towards a little bank some two feet high that bounded the river's edge. After a whispered conference I went down flat on my stomach, and having directed the Honourable to imitate my movements and keep close behind me, I set off and began squirming myself along the ground. Precious hard work it was too. The day was bright and sunny, with a hard frost, and just a sprinkling of snow on the ground. The frozen lumps of earth and stubble points (for we were in a stubble field) cut and pricked hands and knees, and progression was laborious as well as painful. But what did this matter? There were the widgeon, and our patience and trouble would be rewarded by having a good "whang" into them! We had traversed half the distance when there was a roar of wings, and the whole flock, some sixty or seventy in number, rose simultaneously. Oh! the vexation and disappointment of that moment! I felt certain they could not have seen or heard us. What could have put them up? I turned my head and glanced back. Oh! horror! there was the Honourable some ten yards behind me—nearly erect, with only his head and shoulders bent, plodding on. He could not endure the torture inflicted by the nubbly lumps of frozen soil, nor the sharp pricks administered by the stubble points, and so got on his feet, and of course had betrayed our presence. Bitter thoughts arose in my mind, and I fear naughty words rose to my lips, but with an effort I controlled myself, remembering the man was my guest, and so contented myself with pointing out to him the mistake he had committed in the mildest possible manner. He received the admonition most blandly, remarking that as the widgeon were in the water he *did not think they could see him!* Well, after circling round for some time, the birds again pitched, and this time in a most favourable spot, viz., a long deep pool, sheltered by steep banks. Our approach, too, would be further concealed by another bank dividing the river from the field, some five feet high, and which had been thrown up to prevent the land being flooded. This time surely we would get in at our game, no matter what the Honourable did, and so, with "hope elate," I set forward. When we arrived near the spot, I said to Fitzfoozle, "Now you walk straight down to the bank to where you see that dark patch of soil, and I will keep some fifty yards to your left, and parallel with you, but don't start till I get into my place."

I thought he fully understood my instructions, so off I went, and in due time we started. After having traversed a short

distance, and when within some seventy yards of the bank, I saw that the Honourable had diverged considerably from the direction I had pointed out to him as the proper one to pursue. As this course would take him wide of the spot where I knew the birds to be, I began making signals to him to come nearer to me. These, however, he failed to comprehend, and went every way but the way I wanted him to go. At last in despair I held up my hand to intimate to him that he should stop where he was, and I would come and put him right. To my relief he seemed to grasp my meaning, and gingerly I stepped towards him. When within some twenty yards he called out, *quite loud* :

“What do you want me to do?”

Now every one who knows anything of the habits of game, knows what an effect the sound of the human voice has on it, and this instance was no exception to the rule, for the first words had but escaped Fitzfoozle’s lips when the widgeon rose *en masse*, out of shot of course, and winging their way to some more distant spot, vanished out of sight.

This was the last straw that broke the camel’s back, or rather the back of my forbearance, and I fear I gave the Honourable a bit of my mind on the subject of his crass stupidity—not that it had much effect on his rhinoceros-like hide of combined conceit and obtuseness, for if he did not *say* much, I am sure, he *thought* less.

The end of it was that I sent my friend off with the keeper to one part of the river whilst I pursued my way to the other. At the end of the day my bag amounted to six duck, a teal, four snipe and a rabbit, whilst Fitzfoozle could only produce two jack snipe, three rabbits and a partridge, which latter, by the way, I had specially enjoined him *not* to fire at.

On interrogating my keeper subsequently, he said they had seen plenty of duck, but that “the gentleman seemed daft like, wad tak no trouble, and disturbed the birds by firing at ’em when they was oot o’ shot.” The day was, however, a lesson to me, and I made this entry in my mental note-book, viz., “Pursue not the wily duck with a stupid sportsman.”

THE TRUE SPORTSMAN.

It is a relief to turn from the narration of the sins of omission and commission of Messrs. Johnson and Co. to singing the praises of Dick Goodfellow, the true sportsman. Thank heavens! it has been my lot to meet with more of the latter class than the former, and their good deeds far outbalance the evil ones of such specimens as Capt. Bump or the Honourable Fitzfoozle. Annoyances and vexations are transient, but the remembrance of a good turn, forethought and forbearance on the part of another linger in one’s memory whilst life lasts, and must ever be pleasant to recall

and dwell upon. It is needless to say that Dick is a real good shot—not one of your men who on the strength of occasionally killing tremendous long shots earns an apocryphal reputation, but a good shot all round, both at fur and feather. You will never see Dick blazing away at almost impossible distances, and yet he kills his game cleanly, giving them plenty of law, yet not too much. There is no blowing the head off a rabbit, or mangling a bird on his part, and seldom has Velveteens to be called up with his dog and “hie lost” after a “runner.” To begin with, Dick has generally his own dog with him, and a good one to boot, for he would not keep a bad one, and then he “lays forrard,” and so has but few “runners.” Ah, that art of “laying forrard!” How we all wish we could attain to it! No blaming the birds then for coming such a pace down wind, abusing the pheasants for having such abominably long tails that we are deceived thereby, or any of the hundred and one excuses we “duffers” are prone to make in order to hide our want of skill and consequent numerous “misses.” Dick, too, is a master of tactics and strategy as far as the pursuit of game goes. You will never see him hunting dogs *down* wind, and then abusing the poor brutes for springing birds. Neither will you see or hear him when looking for a dead or wounded bird with his retriever keep up a running accompaniment of “Seek lost. Good dog, good dog,” &c. Far different is his mode of procedure. Taking his dog up very quietly to the spot where the bird has fallen he gives a wave of the hand, or just one word—“Seek.” Then he stands stock still until the bird is found or irretrievably lost. He seems to know by instinct the spot where game will lie, and every likely spot is taken in at a glance and tried. It is a treat to go out with him; everything is so well arranged, and all his plans cut and dried. His beaters and “stops” are well drilled. There is no delay or misunderstanding of orders, no shouting or unnecessary noise. Every one knows the part they have to play in the day’s proceedings and *does* it. He is not harsh or overbearing, but he means to be obeyed, and any dereliction of duty on keeper’s or beater’s part, if borne in silence, or with a curt reproof for the moment, means loss of employment for the future if repeated. Generous, too, is Dick—always ceding the best places to others, never bemoaning his bad luck in not getting a number of shots, except maybe in a humorous vein, such as saying “he would probably have missed if they had come his way.” Liberal with his game he is also, as every farmer over whose ground he shoots knows full well, as does every guest at his house, for in each guest chamber a plentiful supply of blank game labels are laid out to be addressed to such friends as the occupant may wish to send a few head of game to. Punctilious in his own observance of all the unwritten laws of sport, he is yet tolerant of those who break them, and will generally find an opportunity of turning the conversation in order to detract attention from the

offender. To night gang poachers he is an inveterate enemy, and shows them no mercy, arguing, and truly, that they deserve none, as they do not poach from love of sport, but with a view to satisfy their animal cravings for drink and pelf. To a man, however, who offends in this respect through an honest love of the thing Dick is inclined to be lenient, bearing in mind that there is such a thing as "manufacturing crime." Should he, however, catch any one red-handed his few quiet and kindly but impressive words have generally more effect on the offender than fifty summonses and fines. Dick is not one of those who because he personally prefers one form of sport to another decries that for which he has the least taste. His motto is "live and let live." As to the ridiculous theory that a big shoot or *battue* is *not* sport, as propounded by some, he laughs at it, knowing full well the care and organization that is a *sine qua non* for such to be successful. Nor does he argue hotly on the rival merits of shooting over dogs *versus* driving, the use of punt guns *versus* shoulder guns, nor all the numerous vexed questions that have lately given rise to such controversy in the shooting world. Talking once to Dick, who will always be associated in my mind with the character of a *true* sportsman, I asked him how he would describe such. His reply was short and, to my mind, to the point. It was as follows: "I think such an Admirable Crichton as you ask me to define ought never to do an unsportsmanlike action, be a lover of nature, and a keen observer of all birds, beasts and fishes, and their habits, prefer quality to quantity in his game, be a fair shot, think of others, and, though he may have his own opinions, take as his motto, 'Bear and forbear.'"

I think few will differ with his definition.

One short anecdote of Dick and I have done. We were both staying with a friend who had some very good rough shooting, and besides ourselves and our hosts there was a youngster out—a very promising shot, and as keen as mustard. We will call him Parker. After lunch we were to try some noted woodcock coverts of scrub oak, that clothed both sides of a winding dell. Young Parker was very anxious to kill a few woodcock, having only killed some half dozen in his life. Just before lunch, however, some mishap occurred to the breech action of his gun, and that weapon, which had been doing good service all day, was rendered useless. We all sympathized with the lad, whose face fell as he bemoaned his bad luck; but nothing could be done. We had none of us a second gun out, and we were too far from our friend's house to send for another; in fact the only thing to be done for young Parker, as he himself suggested with a somewhat wry face, was for the unlucky sportsman to join the beaters, or mark. Now I knew Dick had for some time been looking forward to this day, for he was "nuts" on woodcock. What was my surprise, therefore, at lunch to hear him ask our host what time the post went out, and

on being told the hour reply, "Well, I'm very sorry, old fellow, but I *must* get back, as I have some letters that won't wait till to-morrow."

In vain we all expostulated, and told him "his letters could keep; one post would make no difference, &c." Dick was firm. He must go.

"By-the-by, though," he said, as he lit his pipe and we were preparing to move off, "Parker, you may as well take my gun, and," he added laughing, "mind you hold it straight."

Profuse and grateful were the thanks showered upon him by the jubilant youth, who, putting the gun to his shoulder, vowed "it fitted him to a tee."

We then started and took our places—young Parker in the centre, our host on the left, and myself on the right. A right merry time we had too. There were a good many cock in, a fair sprinkling of pheasants, and just enough rabbits to break the monotony of *toujours bécasse et faisan*. From my position on the top of the dell I could see Parker carrying out Dick's instructions as to "holding straight" to the letter, rocketting cock pheasants, swiftly darting bunnies, and wily twisting longbills he added to the score with hardly a miss. At last as he made a long and very difficult shot, scoring his seventh woodcock, I heard some one behind me exclaim *sotto voce*:

"Well done, youngster!"

I turned to see who the admiring beater was, and beheld Dick!

Holding up a forefinger in warning, he said, "Hush, old man; don't say a word, and please don't split upon me. I wanted to see how the lad would shoot with my old tube."

"Why, Dick, you rascal," I returned, "how about those letters?" whilst a shrewd suspicion that the said letters were pure fiction on his part flashed across my brain.

"Oh, bother the letters. I must see this bit of the covert shot out, and then I shall have plenty of time," was the smiling rejoinder.

"This bit of the covert" took a good half-hour more, and then as Dick, after enjoining the strictest secrecy on me, strode away towards home I could not help remarking to myself:

"There goes the best fellow in the world, and a *true sportsman*!"

IN ONE SHORT YEAR!

By JENNIE R. WÜNSCH.

I SUPPOSE I was very pretty, or Dick perjured his soul to a dreadful extent. I know that his one way of comforting me in the time of our greatest trial, when we thought we should be separated, was to stroke my hair and murmur, "My pretty, my pretty!" in a consoling whisper. It soothed me very much, and made me almost stop crying to listen to him.

If men only knew how much more soothing it is to be told that one is pretty when one is in grief, than to be exhorted to "Be a sensible woman now," they might make more use of this very simple device.

Dick and I were standing in a deep bracken-grown hollow at the end of my father's great park. In our passionate young grief we had eyes and ears for no one but ourselves. I had, however, chosen the very quiet hour of sunset on a May evening to meet my poor lover, and only a few inquisitive but timid rabbits stared with dark eyes at us from the safe vantage of their own round doors, gently moving their soft brown ears with sympathetic interest.

"My pretty Nancy, my dearest girl, it is quite impossible for me not to see the force of your father's reasons. He is perfectly kind and just to you. He wants to make you happy. He calls me a fortune-hunter, therefore I will not accept one penny of his money with you, and I cannot be so selfish as to deprive you of all those comforts you have been accustomed to.

"You are the only comfort I care about, Dick," I sobbed out. "And what good will other comforts do me if I die? For I shall die if I am never to see you again. Father says, if I persist in marrying you, he will cut me out of his will and leave everything to Aunt Betty and her six ugly daughters. Well, dearest, let him do it. It won't make them one bit prettier; and money won't buy them a sweetheart like mine. Do you really believe, Dick, that if I were sitting in a room full of gold with a sack of sovereigns in my arms and saw you outside, that I wouldn't throw the nasty stuff down and rush through the window into your arms? Dick, you don't know much about women. You'll have to take me as I am and begin the study at once."

My lover clasped me a little closer; but he sighed profoundly at the same time.

"I can offer you so little," he said sadly, "nothing but my love and a share of my poverty. But I can work for you. I will work. My uncle Richard has promised to help me to a berth in one of the Oriental mail ships, from which I can work my way up. But, Nancy, there is no rank in the Merchant Service that would meet with your father's approval."

"I am twenty-one!" I cried defiantly, "and if my father chooses to call you names and threaten me with the loss of a horrid lot of money—which only makes us into mean worldly wretches—I shall run away from him and it. I shall certainly run away, Dick, quite soon. You may please yourself whether you help me or leave me to do it alone."

After this bold speech I was forced to hide my shamed face on the breast of Dick's blue uniform; and there I heard his honest heart beating true love's answer to my words. His scruples all vanished, and in the next two hours we had settled the details of my flight. He was to return to Edinburgh, where he lodged with a dear old Scotch lady, of whom he had often spoken to me. I was to follow in a few days. We could be married quietly, and await Dick's appointment in blissful poverty.

I fear I thought very little of my lonely father that evening as I stole home across the wide park, scattering shadowy deer and flurried rabbits from the grassy paths.

My father had always been absorbed in business till he made his fortune, and had taken little notice of his motherless girl. I believe he was fond of me, in a certain way, but wanted to keep me in leading-strings all my life. I was only a piece of the very handsome furniture in his splendid house; and had no more right to have an opinion on my own destiny than his easy-chair had to say where it should stand.

I left him, therefore, without thinking that it could cause him much grief; but I knew that intense anger and wounded pride would make him very bitter against me and my almost penniless lover.

I seemed to live in a dream for the next two or three days, till I got Dick's final letter to say all was ready for me at Mrs. Nicholl's. His bright manly face, the ardent look in his grey eyes as we parted that last evening were ever before me. I went on, however, making very practical preparations, such as packing my plainest gowns, and leaving my finest garments in my huge wardrobe. I knew that the simple little lodgings—up three flights of stairs—would not fit in with "Liberty Art Silk" dinner dresses. It was more likely I should be cooking our dinner than dressing for it. In view of such a charming novelty I packed up some painting aprons, with very smart pockets and bibs—which I knew Dick would think becoming.

I announced my intention of going to visit a school friend in Edinburgh, and my father, who never denied me small pleasures, kissed me at the door as he said good-bye, told me to be a good

girl, and then, as the carriage drove rapidly off, turned to enter his study with an obvious air of relief.

His utter want of suspicion touched me with remorse for the first time. I half started up, and called faintly, "Father!" But the cry was lost amidst the roll of the wheels, and I was fain to drown my remorse in a flood of tears, which only ceased at the end of my long drive to the station.

For the last time a tall footman got my ticket for me, looked after my luggage and stood respectfully at the door of the compartment which he had secured for my exclusive use. I had recovered my spirits now, and laughed when I thought that the next journey I made would probably be by third-class, but with Dick—my husband—to protect me.

It is only a journey of a few hours to Edinburgh from my home. There, on the platform, stood my handsome, eager young lover, and by his side a plain but most benevolent-looking little old lady. She had two grey curls on each side of her round cheeks, and she nodded and smiled at me in the most friendly way as soon as Dick identified me by rushing forward as if to take my lonely compartment by storm.

Conducted "home" by these two enthusiastic creatures, I was shown into a charmingly clean, bright little flat, perched like a bird's-nest high above the picturesque town. An honest-faced, middle-aged Scotch servant opened the door and said gravely:

"Y'er welcome, mem."

"This is my Christie," explained Mrs. Nicholl, "and Mr. Gordon's great admirer."

I smiled at her kind though rugged face. Were not all Dick's friends to be my friends now? She afterwards confided to Mrs. Nicholl that Miss Bell was "as bonnie a bride as she could ha' waled for him hersel'." Which was considered high praise.

Then came the happy days of preparation; the quiet "house" wedding, with only Mrs. Nicholl and Christie as witnesses, and the blissful fortnight in the small cottage in Arran, where Dick and I spent our honeymoon. I abjured wealth and luxury with a light heart. Late dinners and footmen, silk gowns and ladies'-maids, hot-house flowers and soft rolling carriages, all counted as nothing when I stepped lightly over the heather with my tall, brave husband beside me.

I did not think much about my father. I had sent him a letter from Edinburgh announcing my marriage, but he had taken no notice of it.

What did we care? We were absorbed in each other and in day-dreams of the future. How foolish and how happy we were! We talked much of Dick's prospect of advancement. He called me "Mrs. Captain Gordon," and dressed me in all the imaginable embroidery and jewels that a young sailor might find in India for his sweetheart. At last we left Elysium (in the form of a very

uncomfortable but most romantic hut in the depths of a glen) and found ourselves one June evening being welcomed back to our rooms in Edinburgh by Mrs. Nicholl, whose grey curls fairly bristled with importance and pleasure, as she showed us into our part of her tiny house. Christie, in a gown that crackled with starch, hovered in the doorway to share in the pride of her mistress as we exclaimed and praised and wondered over everything. These two devoted women must have spent our whole honeymoon in a grand cleaning and super-polishing, for the furniture almost blinded us by its brilliancy. They had bought yards of cheap white muslin and blue ribbons to convert Dick's bachelor room into a bower for his bride.

That very evening Dick wrote to his uncle about the promised appointment, giving his reasons (me) for desiring to increase his income as quickly as possible.

Our favourite recreation during the summer was to stroll in the evening on the outskirts of Edinburgh. We studied the exterior of small houses, furnishing them from our large stock of imagination, and placing ourselves as a finishing touch, now in the bow-window of that little drawing-room, now sitting on that green bench in the small garden. But always together, my darling—always together!

At last Dick heard that in a month he would be called upon to make the voyage to Bombay, as first officer on board one of the splendid ships with which his uncle's firm was connected. He must go alone, and my heart drooped within me as I thought of the separation from my dearest, and the perils of his journey. He only thought of me.

"Ah, how can I leave you, my pretty Nancy!" he cried; "you will grow pale and ill, and I shall not be there to comfort you. What a selfish brute I was to take you from your home and bring all this trouble upon you!"

I soothed him with brave words, and told him how happy I should be with Mrs. Nicholl and Christie. I promised to take care of my health for his sake, and assured him that all would go well with me. He might be back early in April, he said, and this was December.

He was terribly moved at our parting, and as he strained me to his heart in a last embrace, he murmured:

"God help me! I will come back to you, my pretty; I will come back to my Nancy!"

Then, gently unclasping my hands from his neck, he placed me in Mrs. Nicholl's motherly arms and rushed from the house. Christie followed to bless him on the staircase, and I struggled up to the window in a last gallant attempt to smile down on his pale, upturned face and troubled grey eyes, as he looked his final farewell. Then I slid quietly to the floor in my first fainting fit.

More than three months had passed since my dear husband so remorsefully and anxiously left me. Three months which held much loneliness, much suffering, and in the end much joy.

I was inordinately proud of my baby boy; but my pride was as nothing compared to that of Mrs. Nicholl and Christie. They worshipped him, and often Christie would be caught, duster in hand, hanging over the cradle in speechless admiration when she was supposed to be polishing an already shining room. Mrs. Nicholl "understood babies," and was invaluable to me in my ignorance, and happy in imparting motherly advice.

For some time my heart had been strangely stirred towards my own father. I used to sit sewing, after Dick left home, pondering on the wonderful feelings that move a father's and mother's love towards their helpless little ones. Had my father felt thus towards me? Had my lovely mother—whose portrait hung in my room in my old home, but whose living face I had, alas! never looked upon—felt those yearnings to clasp me in her arms, which, for her, were never gratified? Ah! how cruel and heartless it must seem, when your baby grows up, for it to desert you as I had deserted my father.

Influenced by these feelings I wrote him a letter, begging him to come and see me, or even to send me a word of forgiveness. But my letter was returned to me unopened. Some mutual friends of ours in Edinburgh told me that my father never mentioned my name; that he secluded himself in his house and grounds; never paid or received visits; and snubbed persistently the many gallant attempts of Aunt Betty to plant one, or all, of her ugly daughters upon his hearth. They told me also that he was changed—looked old and grey—and took life with a listless indifference strange in such an active man. After an interval of some months I wrote again to him, telling him, with all a young mother's pride, of my baby. The boy was remarkably like my father, having great dark eyes and a stubble of black hair that looked odd on his tiny baby head. My letter was not returned this time; but no answer came.

Dick had written to me from every port they touched at on his way out. We had telegraphed our good news from Edinburgh, and *now* he was on his way home. Any hour I might get a telegram to say the ship had arrived. Then, I knew, no train could bring him fast enough to my side. My heart beat fast and my colour rose as I thought of his joy when he should clasp "us" in his arms. I ran to the mirror to see if his "pretty Nancy" had lost any of her good looks. I cared only for his sake—he was so proud of my beauty. My face looked thinner, but my dark eyes shone bright with mother love; and certainly a fine colour adorned my cheeks as Mrs. Nicholl came into the room in time to catch me smiling at my own reflection.

She had come to advise me "to look over Mr. Gordon's clothes

and air them a bit at the fire; for no doubt the sea air would have spoilt all his things, and he would want 'a change' when he came home."

To this delightful task I set myself with alacrity, hanging various blue flannel garments with brass buttons on a row of chairs near the fire. As I turned out dear Dick's coats and neckties, which I had not had the heart to look at since he left, I felt as if his presence were very near to me now. One great pilot coat looked so like Dick himself that, after hugging it warmly, I conceived the brilliant idea of spreading it on the bed and laying my baby in it—just to see how he looked. The boy fought with me manfully and refused to have his fat mottled hand thrust under the rough sleeve, but catching sight of the bright gold buttons he laughed and cooed charmingly to them.

As I hung in admiration over this enchanting picture Christie entered the room. She held in her hand a wonderful pair of socks at which she had been working for many evenings to present to "the Captin," as she would insist upon calling Dick. They were knitted in woollen lozenges, and checks, and stripes, till they looked like cribbage boards or anything but socks. She laid them with pride beside the slippers, and then noticed the baby, now fallen asleep in Dick's coat.

"Eh! mem, Guid bless the innocent wee lamb! His faither'll be the prood man to see sic' a sight—I wish he would just step ben."

My heart echoed the wish as Christie left the room hurriedly, saying: "I must look after yon lassie—she's breakin' every dish in the hoose!"

"Yon lassie" was a little red-haired girl, whom I had engaged to help me with my baby; but Christie threatened her with such awful punishments if she ever "daured to lay a finger on him," that she had turned into a small nondescript kind of general helper, only permitted to worship the baby at a distance in leisure moments. I heard her now stumping up the passage to open the front door in answer to a ring that had made my heart leap. Every ring might mean a telegram from Dick.

My bedroom opened off our small sitting-room, and as I heard the door softly open and close again, I looked up, with my lap full of Dick's stockings, and saw—what made my heart bound once with incredible joy, and then seem to cease beating entirely.

I saw a man's tall, slim figure, clad in naval blue, exactly like my husband's—but the face was not Dick's face, and though young and kind, was very, very grave.

"Are you—are you—oh! who are you?" I cried in an agony of suspense. He looked like one tongue-tied with ill news.

"I—I am Dick Gordon's friend," he stammered, "and I have come to—to call on Mrs. Gordon."

Then, as his dismayed glance lighted upon the blue uniform

coat, the baby asleep inside it, and my questioning eyes, this strange young man muttered, "Oh Lord!" and turned as if to escape from the room.

"Stay!" I called in a voice that sounded to myself thin and weak, "Stay, and tell me what you mean! I am Mrs. Gordon. *Where* is my husband?"

"Oh! on board his ship of course. Isn't there any one else here but you? Can't I ring for some one?" he said, his eyes searching round the room for a bell and determinedly avoiding my face. Beads of perspiration started to his brow and he seemed once more to be trying to get away. I grew sick, sick at heart.

"He is ill, or he would have been here before any one!" I cried.

Then, as he reluctantly caught my beseeching look, Dick's friend suddenly turned his back upon me. But not before I had seen his eyes—and they were full of tears.

"Dick is dead," I said in a curious voice that seemed to belong to some poor woman stricken cold with grief, but not to me.

Dick's friend had found the bell now, and was ringing so vigorously that Mrs. Nicholl, Christie and "yon lassie" all appeared at once, filling the little room with questions and agitation. Mrs. Nicholl gave one look at my face, and then ran to catch me in her arms. I pushed her back, and said again in that dull, cold voice:

"Dick is dead!"

She looked at the young man, and I saw him bend his head in mournful assent.

I did not lose consciousness, but all at once my very life seemed to be ebbing away from my heart and limbs. When Mrs. Nicholl led me to the sofa, and sat with her kind arms pressing my head to her breast, I simply lay helpless—powerless to look or feel—but hearing every word.

Dick's friend, now reassured by the presence of the other women, stammered forth a broken narrative.

Dick had come on board at Bombay with the beginning of rheumatic fever upon him—had been very ill—had struggled back to life, nursed by this good friend—and then—and then—just as home was nearing, had been found dead in his sleep, of heart disease.

Dick had talked much to his friend of his wife and child. He made him promise that "if anything happened" he would go to my father first, to implore his protection for me and my little one, and then come to break "it" *gently* to me!

"He thought of nothing but them all the voyage," said the young man huskily. "And he said I was to bring his watch for his little son."

I looked up at this and saw him laying Dick's old watch—that looked like a familiar face—softly upon the table. As he did so

two great tears dropped beside it. How strange that he could cry! His tears must be warm, and I felt so cold—so cold that no warmth could ever come into my frozen veins again.

"Is there nothing for *me*?" I asked.

Dick's friend looked for a moment at me, and then said, unevenly:

"He told me—if he died—I was to give 'his love' to his 'pretty Nancy.'"

The poor young fellow had turned his eyes to the door while speaking. He now rushed out—muttering that he would come again.

But though he wrote to me, I never saw him more.

Torpor took possession of me again. I thought this chill creeping through my veins must mean death; and I was glad in a dull way that it was so easy to join my Dick.

My gallant, handsome Dick! How thin and pale and cold he must be now! But I was coming to him—and surely he would unclothe those pale lips and smile at his "pretty Nancy" still!

I could hear the faint rustle of the women busy about me; I could smell the brandy they were rubbing on my lips. But I did not want to be roused—I wanted to lie thus till I saw Dick's spirit meeting mine.

Suddenly, a tiny cry—growing even louder and clearer—pierced through the stupor in my brain. I tried to shut it out; but it rang in my unwilling ears, and something—could it be my dead heart?—fluttered in answer. I staggered to my feet, and walked swiftly straight to the bed where my baby lay, just waking from sleep and calling for me. As his soft face touched mine the ice in my veins melted, and a rush of warm tears made me feel that I still lived—lived to suffer and be lonely indeed, but to guard Dick's boy.

"Yon lassie" had stolen from the room to attend the door once more; but, warned by her late indiscretion, she called Christie out to interrogate some visitor.

In a second they were both pushed aside, and, with my baby in my arms, I looked up to meet my father's eyes.

He stood in the doorway—white-haired, thin and strangely aged. But, with a look of love and pity in his dark eyes which I had never seen there before, he stretched out two eager trembling hands towards me and Dick's child.

THE POISONED POTION.

By RICHARD ARKWRIGHT,

AUTHOR OF "THE QUEEN ANNE'S GATE MYSTERY," ETC.

"JACK, dear, who is Sir Robert Ballantyne?"

"Ballantyne? Oh, he's a great analyst and writer on chemistry, but better known as the highest authority on the treatment of affections of the brain."

"And what have you been writing to him about?"

"How do you know I have?"

"I happened to look at the letters you left on the hall table this morning."

"Well?"

"Well, I only asked. I wasn't aware that you knew him."

"Oh yes, Ballantyne and I are very old friends."

"But I never heard you mention his name before."

"Indeed!"

This dialogue had been conducted with an evident anxiety on the one side, and reserve on the other, by no means characteristic of the speakers.

Jack Rivers had always been frankness itself, and Dolly the most light-hearted and unsuspicious of wives.

Their married life, indeed, had been one of unalloyed happiness, though undertaken against the advice of all their friends and relations.

Dolly's father had been furious at her engagement to a "beggarly banker's clerk," and had refused to attend her wedding, or to give any assistance towards the young people's housekeeping expenses.

Jack's relatives too, after his neglect of their solemn warnings against marrying a penniless girl, when Miss Argent, with her twenty thousand pounds, might have been had for the asking, had "washed their hands," as they put it, "of the whole concern."

In spite, however, of poverty and isolation, the young wife had never regretted her marriage, nor considered herself other than the happiest of women, till within the last few weeks preceding the above conversation.

The last few weeks!

When and how Dolly's misgivings were first aroused, she scarcely knew, but at the time when she put the question to her husband about his letter to the specialist, they had already assumed a definite form.

She felt convinced that Jack had something on his mind, and she, moreover, suspected the cause of his trouble. It was not only that his habits and manner had gradually changed; that he

omitted the customary little attentions to his wife; that he sat at meals drumming with his fingers on the table, and starting or staring vacantly when suddenly addressed; not only that he displayed a strange irritability; that he locked himself up in his study after dinner, or went out late, with the unsatisfactory explanation that he wanted to read at the club. It was not alone that he came to bed at irregular hours, only to toss and tumble through the weary watches. All this was nothing to the revelation made one awful night, when Dolly, listening breathlessly at his side, overheard his muttered words. She knew he was awake, and not dreaming. Why, then, should he talk of murder and poison, and seem to be balancing in his mind the comparative merits of alternative modes of death? What could it mean?

Could the terrible explanation which had previously crossed her mind be true, and were this irritability, this abstraction and this sleeplessness the symptoms of a weakening mind, of approaching insanity?

Such being the suspicion already entertained, the result of Dolly's discovery that her husband was in correspondence with a brain doctor may be imagined. Evidently, she thought, Jack knew his danger and was asking for assistance, and what was the duty of a wife in the circumstances? Surely to ascertain the nature of the advice given in reply, and to carry it out with all the discretion and devotion possible.

There was no difficulty in the first part of this programme. A letter obviously from Sir Robert Ballantyne, was delivered during Jack's absence from home, and the nature of its contents could be easily discovered without exciting suspicion. Now, however, that the desired information was within her reach, Dolly hesitated.

"Suppose," she thought, "her suspicions were unfounded, and her husband's letter had no connection with the alteration in his manner! Suppose him, instead, the repository of some guilty secret, or, to be himself involved in some criminal enterprise!" Such hesitation, however, was only momentary.

The notion of Jack engaged in any evil project was too preposterous to be entertained, and with a conviction of the correctness of her original suspicions, Dolly opened the letter. It ran thus:

"DEAR JACK,

"Though delighted to hear from you again, I must admit that I am very sorry for the reason which occasioned your letter, and if I thought my remonstrances would have any effect I should recommend you most strongly to abandon your intentions altogether. I, however, promise to keep your secret and to give you my best advice on the professional point you put.

"I should recommend *arsenic*. As your object is to divert suspicion, and to give the impression of accidental death, you should employ a drug which is used both in medicines and vermin-killers.

Arsenic, moreover, has a special advantage, from the fact that it is often taken for the benefit of the complexion. I should suggest its administration in small doses, at considerable intervals. Too sudden a death might lead to investigation, which would be avoided if the symptoms were those of a gradual and progressive illness. This is important, because if 'your beautiful heiress' becomes acquainted with the suspicious circumstances attending the death of No. 1, she might naturally object to becoming No. 2. But once more, I advise you to give up your project altogether. It is a very heavy risk, especially to one in your position.

"Yours ever,

"ROBERT BALLANTYNE."

The room where Dolly was sitting was light enough. The handwriting of the letter was legible enough; but had it been traced in unknown characters or studied in a darkened room, its meaning could not have been less intelligible. What was Jack's secret and what the heavy risk he ran? What this mysterious suggestion regarding the employment of arsenic? And who was the intended victim whose death must be guarded from the attendance of suspicious circumstances? "No. 1! No. 2!" "Your beautiful heiress!" Then suddenly the whole truth stood disclosed in a revelation surpassing in horror the wildest of Dolly's previous apprehensions. She saw it all at last, and realized herself to be the object of the detected conspiracy! No wonder now at the alteration in her husband's manner. No wonder at his restless nights, and his moodiness and irritability.

"Your beautiful heiress!" How dare her husband allow the use of such terms! And about a woman too whose claims to good looks he had always denied.

"Your beautiful heiress, indeed!" Strange that at such a time these words should rivet the attention of their reader almost to the exclusion of every other consideration; that at the moment of the discovery of a deliberate plot against her own life, Dolly's mind should dwell less on the awful nature of the contemplated crime, than on the motive for its commission!

The idea that Jack should plan her death with the object of marrying her former rival seemed by far the darkest feature in the terrible revelation. For the meaning of the allusion was easily apprehended. "Your beautiful heiress" could have reference only to the girl whose partiality for the attractive Jack Rivers had been notorious.

Kate Argent, indeed, with her handsome face and fortune, had been a seriously disturbing element during Dolly's engagement, and her existence had not been forgotten. And thus in the first transports of pique and jealousy the real horror of the situation was overlooked, and the discovery accepted rather with indignation than alarm. But not for long.

By the time that she had restored the letter to its envelope, and replaced it among her husband's other correspondence, she fully realized the danger of her position. And what should she do? She had no friends in London whom she could confide in. She had only a few shillings in her possession, and, in any case, she shrunk from the idea of presenting herself at her father's house as a runaway wife.

What should she do? Should she make her discovery public, and throw herself on the protection of the police, or should she conceal her knowledge of her husband's intentions, and await some more favourable opportunity of escape? Something, at any rate, must be done. But what is this—this strange sensation which seems first to numb her heart, and thence to radiate through every nerve and pulse? Dolly was awake and perfectly conscious of her surroundings; she was sitting in her own room, among her own familiar furniture and ornaments. She could see the sunlight on the wall playing with the shadows of the laburnum leaves. She could hear the tick of the clock, the loud chirping of the sparrows at the windows, and the distant roar of the street traffic. She could smell the faint perfume of the mignonette in the flower boxes on the sill. But she could neither stir nor speak. No movement resulted from her frenzied efforts to rise, and when, in agony at the discovery, she tried to call for help, no sound followed. Though acutely sensible of the horror of her position, and of her own helplessness and danger, Dolly sat dumb and motionless; and by degrees the senses of sight and hearing, hitherto clear and accurate, became dim and distorted. The well-known objects surrounding her took strange and fantastic shapes, and the customary sounds assumed new and unnatural meanings. Dolly was no longer in her own room in the little lodging in the Borough. Those blossoms which surrounded her were not the counterfeit flowers of chintz and carpet, nor that monotonous hum the roll of distant wheels. They were real flowers, and they fringed the margin of a bright river that glided by to the cadence of its own soft singing. And along its banks walked Dolly, and Jack was with her; but how sadly altered! He moved silently at her side. There was no caressing touch, no look of love in his eyes, no tone of tenderness in his voice; and at every step he seemed to force her nearer to the river's brink. Then the aspect of the river itself changed, and its ripples seemed to utter sounds of warning and woe. The lights that had flecked its shallows disappeared, and the flowers that had edged its margin drooped and faded. The stream once glittering in its own brightness, and borrowing further beauty from the earth and sky, grew murky and opaque. Strange shapeless monsters seemed to writhe and wallow beneath its surface; and still Jack pressed closer to her side, till the narrow pathway crumbled under her feet, and she fell headlong into the depths of the rushing torrent. Then succeeded an

immeasurable period of rapid transit through seething waters, and afterwards of silence, of darkness, of insensibility, of annihilation.

* * * * *

When Dolly returned to consciousness, and found herself in her own bed, she at first imagined herself to be waking after an ordinary night's rest. She was, however, soon convinced by a sense of prostration and indefinable fear that something unusual had occurred. This conclusion, moreover, was confirmed by the presence of two strangers, who presented the appearance of a nurse and doctor in attendance on her. Before, however, she had had time to satisfy herself of the truth of her impressions she relapsed into insensibility. On re-opening her eyes after an interval she observed no change in the character of her surroundings. The doctor, indeed, was not visible; but from a conversation which she overheard she had little doubt that it was he who was describing to some interested inquirer in the adjoining room the nature of her own malady. The voices of the speakers were low, the door between the bedroom and the dressing-room was nearly closed, and yet with a morbid acuteness of hearing Dolly caught distinctly the meaning of every whispered word, and recognized the questioner's voice to be her husband's.

"And you forbid me to see her even for a moment?"

"Most positively. Through the whole of the delirium this extraordinary dread of you has been her one dominant idea. If she caught sight of you now, I could not answer for the consequences."

"But I thought you said the crisis was past, and that she would probably wake again in a perfectly rational condition."

"Quite so; and in ordinary circumstances you would naturally be the first person she would be allowed to see; but I must tell you honestly that these are not ordinary circumstances."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this. Rightly or wrongly, your wife has the gravest suspicions about you. She believes you to be engaged in some conspiracy against her life."

"But surely you attach no importance to what people say in their delirium?"

"Not generally, but this is a peculiar case. There has been a logical coherence in her ravings throughout her illness, which convinces me that her distrust of you was the cause, and not the consequence of her attack of brain fever. Till I am satisfied that her apprehensions are removed, it would be madness to let her see you. As it is, if she happened to overhear your voice, the result might be very serious. You must be contented, for the present, to leave her with me."

"But you'll find out the meaning of it all, and give me the earliest possible news?"

"Of course I will."

"And talk to her at once?"

"No, not to-night. She is still in a state of great prostration. To-morrow, when she has had some natural sleep and taken some nourishment, it may be different."

The doctor was justified in his fear of the effect on his patient of the sound of her husband's voice, as was proved by the condition in which he discovered her on re-entering the sick room. He was mistaken, however, in his belief that the explanation of her agitation would necessarily be deferred. As soon as he had taken his place at the invalid's bedside, she introduced the topic herself.

Even during the short period which had preceded Dolly's relapse into unconsciousness, the appearance of her medical attendant had attracted her favourable attention. Beyond the expression of kindness which suggested ready sympathy, she had noticed a look of power and determination which promised assistance as well as pity. The conversation which she had overheard confirmed her original impression, and while reminding her of the actual nature of her awful secret, pointed out a suitable repository for it.

"Doctor," she said, "do you know Sir Robert Ballantyne?"

"Yes," was the answer, given after a pause.

"I know him, too," continued Dolly excitedly, "a heartless, wicked man. I can see his face now; a low dark forehead; cruel, cunning eyes——"

"Oh, no, Ballantyne is not as bad as that."

"I know more than you think. He and Jack want to poison me, that Jack may marry again."

"Pray compose yourself, madam. You are under some strange delusion."

"It is no delusion; I opened Sir Robert's letter and learned the whole plot."

"My dear Mrs. Rivers! I assure you you must have mistaken his meaning."

"But I remember the very words: '*I should employ arsenic, and I should suggest its administration in small doses.*'"

"My good lady, let me set your mind at rest. Your husband is writing a novel."

"Writing a novel!"

"Yes. He calls it '*The Poisoned Potion.*' The villain murders his wife, with the object of marrying a woman with money; and your husband required assistance on a medical point. He wanted the name of a poison——"

"But if that is all," interrupted Dolly, "what was the risk Sir Robert warned him against?"

"Perhaps," was the answer, given with a smile, "Ballantyne was thinking of his own early literary efforts. A first work is generally a heavy drain on an author's pocket."

It might have been supposed that these explanations would have sufficiently proved the groundlessness of the invalid's appre-

hensions, but she was still dissatisfied. The story was plausible enough, but how could she be sure of its truth? Might it not be itself a fiction devised for the purpose of allaying her excitement. Moreover, was it probable that Jack would confide the history of his novel and correspondence with Sir Robert Ballantyne to this new acquaintance? Was it likely, when he had never mentioned the subject even to his wife, that he should communicate it to the doctor, who, no doubt, was the local practitioner summoned at the time of her attack of illness?

Convinced by these considerations that she was the victim of a deception, Dolly put a further question:

"But how do you know all about my husband's book and Sir Robert Ballantyne's letter?"

"My dear Mrs. Rivers, I am Sir Robert Ballantyne."

And well for Dolly that it was so, and that the services of such a skilled physician had been available during her illness.

Her condition, indeed, had at first seemed hopeless, but care and skill eventually triumphed, and from the moment when the cause of Dolly's apprehensions was removed, her recovery was rapid and uninterrupted.

* * * * *

The nature of the first meeting between husband and wife, with its strange mixture of mirth and tears, can be only indicated; Dolly's contrition was met by a hearty acknowledgment of Jack's share in the responsibility for the mystification. Not that he could be fairly blamed for the solicitude on his wife's behalf, which had been alike responsible for his literary enterprise, and for the secrecy observed regarding it.

The notion of the "Poisoned Potion" had indeed originated in its author's desire to increase his income, and furnish his wife with the comforts to which she had once been accustomed.

While anxious for her enjoyment of the benefit of his success, he had determined to spare her the anxieties preceding its accomplishment.

A mutual misunderstanding had ensued. Dolly ascribed to the wrong cause her husband's restlessness and pre-occupation, while he attributed his wife's evident anxiety to the privations to which she was subjected.

"The Poisoned Potion," Jack's sensational novel, appeared while the appetite for "mysteries" was at its zenith, and was admitted to be the success of the year. Dolly's father has now little reason to be ashamed of his son-in-law, no longer the "beggarly clerk," but one of the most prosperous authors of the day. Jack's relations, too, who "washed their hands of the whole concern," when it was represented by the little house in the Borough, act very differently now that it has taken the form of a well-appointed and hospitable establishment in one of the most fashionable streets of Mayfair.

PAST AND FUTURE.

By LADY STUART HOGG.

Looking and longing for Life,
For the time to do and dare,
For my hour to join the strife
And to see the world so fair.

Looking and longing for Joy,
In the radiant days of youth,
When pleasure felt no alloy
And I doubted not honour or truth.

Looking and longing for Love,
For a heart to respond to mine,
Till I heard its echo above,
In the air which seemed divine.

Looking and longing for Peace,
For the calm which follows pain,
When memories drear shall cease
And the sunset follow the rain.

Looking and longing for Death,
When life and love are no more,
When with feeble ling'ring breath
I sigh for the past gone before.

For the joy that flew past like a cloud,
For the love that was given in vain,
For the hours that by sorrow were bowed,
For the peace and the calm once again.

Yet I look and long still, far above,
Beyond earth's confusion and strife,
To where the great heart of Love
Shall solve the enigmas of Life.

"SHEBA."

A STUDY OF GIRLHOOD.

By "RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "DAME DURDEN," "DARBY AND JOAN," "THE LADY NANCY,"
"GRETCHEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XLI.

"A GUARD OF HONOUR."

THE heat grew more intense and stifling as the night advanced, and Sheba, lying under the shrouding mosquito curtains, and listening to the monotonous buzz of those indefatigable insects, tried vainly to sleep.

All sorts of thoughts and memories came crowding into her wakeful brain. Memories of her childhood, her old home, her old pets, and the life that now looked so far off and strange that sometimes she had to pause, as it were, and ask herself if she were really and truly the same Sheba Ormatroyd.

There is nothing more puzzling in life than the change it brings to ourselves at certain seasons, so that the child looking back on the infant, the youth on the child, and the man or woman on the youth, cannot but ask, "Was I really—that?"

The change is inexplicable, nevertheless it is as surely a law of nature as the inexorable Fate which brings us into the world, and gives us a definite career when there; which also dowers us with a definite stage of progression from infancy to old age with their diverse passions and desires—removing us without our will, even as it has created us without our consciousness—a Fate whose power not all man's knowledge can fathom, nor all his science control.

There is something terrible in such a fate when we let ourselves think of it. Perhaps that is the reason why so few do let themselves think of it, but prefer to eat, drink and be merry, and make believe life is perpetual holiday.

For it is an awful thought that here we stand on the shores of a dark and endless sea, whose name is death, and that all the great mysteries of the universe are around and about us, yet tell us nothing save that Time and Eternity are one and the same thing.

Science but gropes blindly along its stony road, being constantly met by the mandate, "thus far and no further." Religion

has been twisted and perverted into such bewildering and shapeless forms that the soul grows weary with searching for a God, who wears always the face and form and garniture of man; and if all the weary and toiling creatures who people the earth stopped to think of these mysteries at all, they would go mad with the horror and hopelessness of life. So perhaps it is Heaven's mercy that the thinking souls are few, and that the needs of the body are imperative, and that the soup-pot needs replenishing, and the child's smile becomes a cry unless its mouth is filled, and so the sympathy of humanity is narrowed into selfishness, and we sit individually each on our own small throne of importance, and try to shut our ears and eyes to the misery and hopelessness of the world at large.

Sheba, as yet, knew nothing of the great human world of cities, and of the crime and want, and suffering and misery, that make up the portion of one half the race of man.

That is the best of the new world. Life is more equal; it is less a thing of competition and struggle; a hand-to-hand fight with hungry labourers ready to undersell one another for a bare existence.

Brains have their full value, so have strength, skill and intelligence. This is saying nothing new of course, but it is a pity that it should not be reiterated in the ears of a class who obstinately cling to beggary and starvation, when they might have food and labour almost for the asking.

Man's nature seems essentially cruel. He is cruel to the brute whose labour he exacts, cruel to woman when she is weak and at his mercy, cruel to his own sex and to himself in the aggregate. How he grudges the wage of labour when once he is payer instead of payee; how he invents laws which are beautifully adapted to the just and the unjust; how he prates of freedom, yet is in himself a secret tyrant, ready to seize the reins of government the instant they are wrested from one form of rule and only adjust them to another which great words have dignified, but, alas! few great acts have ever ennobled into what the words seemed to promise.

For the great leader who preaches equality never forgets the cash-box, any more than the high priest of any order ever forgets the offertory, or the trappings that dignify his superior person.

So that we can but see in all forms and conditions of history that the *nature* of the individual is always the same, though circumstances may lead him to play his part with more or less credit. However self-sacrificing and noble his actions may be—up to a certain point—once *that* point is reached, selfishness and self-importance invariably assert themselves, and the fact of his advancing even one step ahead of his fellow-men, is quite enough to make him vainglorious.

The general, the statesman, the lawgiver, the priest, the man of

business, the inventor, the artisan and the artist, nay, even the author and the critic (more especially the critic, for he holds a very great office and generally loses his head by reason of much adulation and his own knowledge of what that adulation is worth), all develop this same trait. We call it human nature, because human nature is essentially a thing of self, and the pride of self, and the glorification of self, and the care and nurture and consideration of self. Therefore, it cannot help being what it is, and it will never be levelled into one uniform equality because you cannot level brains, and there will always be the fool, and the patient man, and the timid, and the dreamer, and the hypocrite, and some one is bound to rule them, and get the best of them even in a small way. Perhaps this accounts for nature's beneficent providing of the Jew, for he is a creature of resource and a grasper of opportunity, and one of the best utilizers of the needs of his fellow-man, provided that fellow-man has the good fortune to be a Christian.

But this is a long diversion from Sheba Ormatroyd and the mosquitoes.

She tossed from side to side, wide-eyed, feverish and sleepless, living over and over again in memory the short phase of her actual years; wondering a little what her mother had said of her conduct, and whether Pharamond was reconciled to the answer his suit had received, and what Bessie was doing, and if Aunt Allison had heard of her escapade, and what Noel Hill would say and think about it.

She felt instinctively that he would not approve of what she had done, though she was far from imagining any personal or more selfish motive of disapprobation, than the one of friendship and interest.

But he was so good, so self-sacrificing. What could he know of that unhappy home life, that cruel tyranny, that shameless bartering which had at last forced her into open revolt?

Had not her whole life been more or less a struggle and a repression, a constant giving in to others, when her soul had all the time craved for love, knowledge, peace, the fulness of deeper things, the touch of wider sympathies. Had she not always been alone as far as any comprehension of her nature went, until that one glorious hour of her life when love had touched her with his divine chrism, and in the strength and beauty of another life she first recognized the perfecting of her own.

What use to speak of it?

What comprehension had natures like her mother's, or Mr. Levison's, of love such as she felt for Paul Meredith? They had mocked at the bare mention of the word which to her had been as the very holy of holies. Laughed it and her to scorn, until she had felt shamed and sickened and only longed to hide herself from the sight and sound of such mockery.

Love had come to her in the guise of an angel, as, indeed, he only comes to the very innocent, and the very young. He had found her heart empty, and had filled it even to overflowing. Perhaps the greatness of her own passion and her own soul helped that overflow, for assuredly Paul Meredith was no hero; yet to her he was the magician whose spell had changed all her life, the embodiment of dreams still half divine. She felt no need now of any world that held not him, of any life that should cease to bring the echo of his voice to her ears. For three months she had lived in the absorption and isolation of a dream, but while she revelled in its sweetness and trembled at its power, she knew that to the world without it would seem but as the folly of a poet's fable, as the daylight to the blind worm who burrows in the earth, unheeding the glory of the sun.

But there was no need to speak of these feelings to others. She herself was absolutely content, and, for the first time in her life, absolutely happy. Had that life been different, love would have meant for her a struggle with duty; but what duty did she owe to the tyrannous abuse of a law that makes a parent the ruler of a child's destiny? That demands blind obedience, instead of rational submission. Beautiful as is the virtue of unselfishness, yet it can be strained to a point beyond moral or rational obligation, and it is hard to say on whom the greatest amount of misery is entailed, the exactor of such submission, or the giver of it. In either case a human life suffers, a human soul is dragged through abysses of darkness and agony and shame, and the gain seems small and insignificant after all, let us dignify it by what name we please. Sacrifice, obedience, duty, honour. Do they hold any salve for the broken heart, the slaughtered youth, the anointed shame, which is no real marriage-rite, let the world say what it will?

And the pitiful part of it all is, that the sins and the sufferings, and the cruelties and oppressions, are all brought to bear on one little human life, all conspiring to crush its promise and wreck its future, when it might just as well be left to be happy, and hold its share of love, and grow at peace and thankful, instead of rebellious and, too often, criminal.

We seem to grudge each other happiness, just as we grudge each other fortune or fame, or rank or success, or that ambiguous and ephemeral thing we designate as Luck. We grudge *that* most of all because it might so easily come to us individually, instead of going to our next-door neighbour, who is neither so deserving nor so likely to make a good use of it as ourselves. And the beauty of it all is that we never allow that we *do* grudge these things, or are even in the smallest degree envious of them. We build up fine phrases, airy fabrics, that crumble into dust the moment a wind of adversity touches the subject of our blatant congratulations; but for all that they *seem* hearty and sincere

enough. It is only to our own secret hearts that we whisper that little ill-natured remark about "luck" and its by no means well-chosen recipients. It is probably some fellow-feeling of this nature that has led us to paint the Fates as blind, and to place a bandage over the eyes of justice, although she holds a balancing scale in her hand.

As yet Sheba had no practical experience of the ways of the world. She had learnt a great deal from old Müller, and the cravings of that hungry intellect had made her read and think a great deal more than most girls of her age; but of poverty, oppression, shame, of the colossal ignorance and suffering of one class of humanity, and the selfishness and indifference of another she was comparatively ignorant. She read of them, but as yet they only came to her as her misty speculations of the old world came, the world of crowds and cities and human bee-hives, and great manufactories, and vast stores of wealth, the like of which she was never likely to see in the colonies.

To-night, in the restlessness of mind and body that had come to her with the increasing heat, and the inability to sleep, she began to think of that other world, and to wonder whether she would ever see it.

"Perhaps he will take me some day," she thought, and blushed even in the darkness because of the thought, and then, feeling that sleep grew more impossible every moment, she pushed aside the curtains and went over to the window, and, leaning there, stood looking out at the brilliant starlight, and the silver sheen of grass and flower, and watched the gentle flittings of birds and the soft movement of the dusky boughs until a longing seized her to be out there also in the fragrant bush among the scents and shapes of the forest, as in the old childish days that looked so far away.

All the rooms opened on to the verandah, and ten minutes later she was flitting over the grassy space that lay between the house and the fields of maize, a white slender shape with long dusky hair flowing unbound to her feet.

She came to the creek, and followed its course by the swamp oaks and gum-trees, skirting the thicket of scrub by a path she had discovered for herself.

The moonlight flooded all around her with streams of liquid silver. The night was so clear, the air so transparent that she could have seen to read without the slightest difficulty. She had no fear whatever. The few natives near the place were simple kindly folk enough, and they all knew her by this time. She walked on and on with a curious sense of freedom and delight, thinking how foolish people were to spend such lovely hours as these in hot rooms and unrefreshing slumber.

She left the creek at last, and turning aside through the broken-down scrub came into a wide open space where some of

the bush giants had been felled, and lay waiting the workmanship of man.

Here the grass was green and fresh by reason of the dense shade that even in the day-time kept off the burning sun, and all around the huge trunks of the gum-trees towered in their glorious strength, and stretched away in endless aisles like the columns in some great cathedral.

As the girl stepped into the open space, and the moonlight fell on her white dress and dusky uncovered head, there came a little strange cry—half of fear, half of surprise—and some one stepped out of the lurking shadows and faced her, and the cry was echoed by her own lips as, hesitating and startled, she saw her lover standing before her in that moonlit solitude.

"Paul!" she stammered.

"I thought you were a ghost," he said laughing a little as he came nearer to her across the silvered grass. "In the name of all that's wonderful, child, what brings you here at this time of night?"

"I could not sleep," she said, "and the bush tempted me. It is an old friend, you know; I thought I would go for a walk. I never dreamt——"

"You never dreamt that some one else might have the same idea," he said, smiling down at her flushing face. "Wonderful! is it not? and I was just thinking of you, and wishing that some kind fairy would transport you here. Still more wonderful. Who says Fate is not kind? Come here, my Sheba, and sit beside me. Since chance has sent us a charmed hour, and our faithful watchdog is not at his post, we would be foolish not to make the best of it. What say you?"

"I am afraid, Paul," she said softly, "that I shall always say what you—wish."

She was standing before him, and he was looking into her great deep eyes; the moonlight lit her face with a rare and delicate charm, the rippling masses of her hair hung round her like a mantle. It struck Paul for the first time that she was almost beautiful. He had never as yet given much thought to her appearance, the charm she had for him lay so much deeper than in mere external loveliness, than colour and shape, or hair, or feature; but to-night she seemed to possess that charm, and all a woman's attributes of beauty with it.

That look lasted so long that it seemed to hold them in a trance, and when at last he held out his hand and drew her to the seat beside him on one of the fallen trees, she felt like one in some strange and beautiful dream.

The magnetism of that stronger presence seemed to bear her along on the current of its will. She knew it was such moments as these that transform life, and make its every other pain endurable. They sat there side by side, saying but little, and that only in murmurs, yet each heart was brimful of gladness, and felt with

subtle consciousness the long dreamy pause, the grave untiring gaze, the soft lingering touch of some rare caress.

Of what could they speak save love. How it had come, so strangely and unexpectedly. What it had done for them—how netted their lives in strange entanglement. How much it still might do in the future that youth made hopeful.

Sheba listened in the deep and full content of self-surrender. All the garnered love and passion and worship of her enthusiastic nature had given itself to this man's keeping, and for the gift of his own love she deemed no sacrifice too great.

Some consciousness of this came to Paul Meredith in this hour of intoxication, but he was man enough and brave enough to thrust aside its perilous tempting. She was so young, so innocent, so utterly at his mercy, that she called forth all the innate chivalry of his nature, and made him her protector by very virtue of her own defencelessness.

"I have done her harm enough, God knows," he thought, as he met that look of passionate adoration, which she could no more withhold when she met his eyes than the sun can withhold its light from the dawn. "She shall never have ~~it~~ in her power to say I sullied the beauty of that pure soul."

It was that purity and that utter fearlessness that had so great a charm for him. She was utterly alone, and utterly at his mercy had he chosen to whisper the poison in her ears that adulterates the meaning of love in the mind of man. She had but her weak girl's heart to betray, or protect her, as she rested there against his own in the loneliness and silence of that magical midnight.

The chance that she might ever be his wife was far off and difficult to determine. He had taken steps to shake off the dishonourable fetters that for years he had disregarded, but his very dilatoriness had been pleaded as condonation, and in those great and half inaccessible districts, proofs were difficult to obtain, and justice an expensive luxury. But he did not tell the girl at his side of these things. He would not dim that beautiful trust and hope until it was impossible to satisfy them any longer, and when his conscience accused him and his own wider knowledge of the world and its code of honour whispered that he had placed this girl in a false position, and that every hour she remained under his roof added to his wrong-doing, he would salve the sting and hush the rebuke by the assurance that at least she was happy and at peace, and that long before a whisper of worldly wisdom could disturb her innocent paradise, she should be safely and honourably his own.

A great love is consecration—but so few loves are really "great" that the world has long agreed to class them under one heading. But when such a love comes to man or woman it is holier and nobler, and infinitely more beautiful than any sacramental rite, or priestly ceremony can make it. . But it is rare.

It had its birth in the old days when men were chivalrous and women pure, and heart spoke to heart without prudery or worldly considerations. Perhaps men and women are too highly civilized now for idyllic virtues, so they have lost the old simple beautiful faith, and replaced it only by exotic passions, whose chief charm lies in the fact that they are illicit; or by cynical censure, which affects to disbelieve that love is of any worth—even if it does exist.

CHAPTER XLII.

COMPLICATIONS.

THE sun's rays were kindling the hill tops with gold, and bringing out all the beauty of the valleys.

The bush was alive with bird and animal life, the whirr of the locust, the laugh of the jackass, the scream of the small bright-winged paraquet, the sharp strange note of the coach-whip.

Sheba raised herself suddenly with a start. "I believe I was asleep," she said.

"I believe so too," said Meredith laughing. "At least, you have not spoken a word for the last hour, and I was near following your example."

She drew herself away from his arms and stood upright, shaking back the long rippling masses of hair, and then twisting them round and round her head.

"I suppose," she said, "we ought to go home?"

He stood up also, smiling down at her from his tall height. His face was somewhat pale, the loose fair hair was blown back from his forehead by the breeze that stirred the trees; his eyes met hers, grave, fond, a little sad.

"I suppose so," he said. "I wish, Sheba, there was no one in the world to trouble about our actions, except ourselves."

"Why?" she asked, looking up and meeting his glance with something of wonder in her own.

"Why," he echoed. "Oh, I suppose because I might keep you all to myself. We might live here, and I could work for you, and we should forget there was such a thing as a world at all, and be another Adam and Eve in our own paradise."

"I am afraid," said Sheba gravely, "you would soon get tired of your Eve. She is such an ignorant, unaccomplished person."

He smiled, that tender lingering smile that she knew so well now, and that always seemed to her like the warmth and beauty of sunlight.

"She is quite accomplished enough for me," he said, "and it would be difficult to tire of her; she has so many moods and ways, one seems never quite to know her. That is in itself a charm. To

get chance peeps into a mind that still has depths and depths to sound——."

Sheba was silent. The warm colour touched her face, and her eyes were downcast. She felt in her heart that the mere presence of her Adam made paradise for her, that she would have breasted every storm of fate so that only they might be *together*.

He held out his hand. "Come," he said; "let us go. This is a night to be remembered, only the worst of such a memory is, that it makes one athirst for repetition."

He drew her hand within his arm and they went across the clearing and came into the track by the creek. As they reached the water-side he paused. "I am not going further," he said. "I shall have a bathe here. You had best go in now and try and get a sleep before breakfast. I hope you won't meet Müller."

"Why?" asked Sheba in surprise.

"Oh," said Meredith. "He is such a strict guardian, he might not approve of midnight rambles."

"Was it wrong?" she said. "I did not know I should meet you, and I could not sleep, the house seemed unbearable."

"Of course it was not—wrong," laughed Meredith gaily. "Haven't we agreed to throw conventionality overboard, and all the humbug and nonsense bred of an ultra-refined civilization?"

They parted then, and Sheba went on to the house. Everything around was very still. The fowls alone were stirring in the hen-roost, and stretching their wings and throats to greet the day. As she crossed the garden to the verandah she came face to face with Müller.

He was attired in a loose suit of grey alpaca, and had a wide straw hat on his head. When he saw the girl he stopped short in evident surprise.

"And where have you been so early, *mein Fräulein*?" he asked. "Ach, what a night! The heat, the mosquitos. I feel one big blister. I go to bathe my wounds in the creek."

"I will have breakfast ready by the time you come back," said Sheba. "Paul is having a bathe also."

"Paul?" He looked at her scrutinizingly. "So . . . you have been walking, eh? A lover's meeting—the accident that is of chance."

"Well," said Sheba laughing gaily. "The truth is that I couldn't sleep, so I got up and went for a walk, and Paul couldn't sleep, and he also got up and went for a walk, and chance as you call it, led us in the same direction."

The old man's brow darkened slightly. "So," he said again. "Well, go within. You look as fresh as if sleep were of no moment. We shall be back in an hour for breakfast if you can get any of those black niggers up to get it ready."

He nodded carelessly and walked on, while Sheba went within and bathed and dressed, and then woke little Paul and helped him

with his toilet, after which she laid the breakfast-table in the verandah, and set a great bowl of fresh-gathered roses in the centre, while the black boy brought hot rolls and tea and fresh eggs from the kitchen, and dishes of peaches and apricots from the garden, which was a natural orchard in itself.

Just as everything was ready the two men appeared, and they all sat down in the wide shady verandah to the pleasant morning meal.

Sheba soon noticed, however, that there was a cloud on Meredith's brow and that Müller was not so genial as usual. She wondered a little what had disturbed them, but asked no questions, only busying herself with little Paul, who was looking pale and languid with the heat, and had quite lost his appetite.

When breakfast was over they dispersed ; Meredith to practise ; Sheba to her household duties, the child following her everywhere, and Müller to his books and his big pipe in the verandah.

The girl usually devoted her mornings to the child, but to-day he seemed so languid and tired that she gave him no lessons, but merely took him on her knee and told him fairy tales until at last he fell asleep. She laid him down on his bed in the room he shared with her, and drew the mosquito net round him, and let down the blinds to keep out the sun.

Then she took up a pile of MSS. paper and went out into the shady verandah, intending to write till the mid-day meal was ready.

She had made considerable progress with her book, and the writing of it was quite a labour of love. The story in itself was simple, but her treatment of it was fresh and original, and even Müller, who subjected its progress to severe criticism, had professed a belief that it would do.

Having no further hope of assistance from Noel Hill, Sheba had determined to try to get it published in Melbourne, or run it in some paper or periodical there. She gave four or five hours every day to her work, until gradually it began to engross her and take hold of her, as all work does for which the author has any talent. She came out now into the verandah and went over to her table. To her surprise, she saw Müller was still there.

"Well, *mein Herr*," she said laughing, "are you going to smoke all the morning?"

He looked at her keenly under the shade of his fierce grey eyebrows. "I have been waiting for you," he said gruffly. "Put down that ; I want to talk."

"Certainly," said Sheba, as she deposited her pile of papers on the bamboo table. "I am quite at your service."

But when she had seated herself on one of the low cane chairs scattered about, and sat patiently waiting for him to begin the conversation, he seemed at a loss how to do it.

The clouds of smoke came thicker and thicker, and the girl sat

there with her hands clasped on her knee; her face, pale now and a little serious, lifted to his own.

She grew uneasy at last at his silence.

"Has anything happened?" she asked. She was always dreading that something would; she did not know what form or shape that *something* would take, but there was a vague fear at her heart that she would not be allowed to live for long in this peaceful paradise—that some serpent sting would find its way there and the old pain and the old unhappiness would be her portion once again.

"The mail was in this morning," said Müller at last. "No, you need not look alarmed—there was nothing for you. Happy are they who receive no letters; they are spared one of the principal sources of worry in this world. Some day I must write a history of 'Letters that no one wants.' There are a lot of papers—some two months back. I see your friend Miss Saxton is married and has gone to England. What do you think of that?"

"Married!" cried Sheba amazed. "Bessie married? To whom?"

"To your quondam lover and admirer, Count Pharamond," said Müller with an odd little laugh. "Queer, isn't it? The heart at the rebound caught by the careful watcher—eh?"

"To Pharamond!" cried Sheba, fairly astounded at the news. "Oh, poor girl, poor Bessie! What could have made her do it?"

"Ambition, perhaps," said Müller, shrugging his shoulders. "She is a fool; she will be sorry for it. You see now why she helped you—she wanted to catch him for herself."

Sheba grew very pale. "Have you heard anything else?" she asked. "Anything from—from——"

"No," he said shortly; "but Paul has had bad news. They say he will lose his case. She is going to defend it out of spite. Of course it means delay, and expense—and difficulty. She is in Melbourne now——"

"Yes?" said Sheba as he hesitated.

"Well," he went on, gravely regarding her, "it seems she has heard of—you."

"Of *me*?" the girl started, her hands dropped, her eyes, startled and dilated, fixed themselves on his face. "But what then—does it make any difference?"

"Yes," said Müller shortly; "it gives her a case, and it damages Paul's defence. Besides, the other man is dead. There is no one to prove the attempt on Paul's life—and it is all so long ago, and he has condoned it by his indifference. It will be long, difficult, complicated—the issue is impossible to determine, and meanwhile"—he looked at the girl's white face and beautiful, pained eyes—"meanwhile," he said sternly, "you are in a false position, and Paul is in a false position, and every day makes it harder for you both; especially"—and again he looked at her

keenly—"especially if you are going for midnight rambles together."

The red blood dyed Sheba's cheeks the hue of the rose in her gown. She felt instinctively that she had in some way offended against that unwritten code of propriety which is an inherent instinct in feminine nature.

She drew herself up proudly. "It was an accident," she said. "I told you so."

"Nay," he said kindly, "I am not blaming you. But I love you as if you were my own child, and so must I be careful of you. You are young and innocent as a baby; of the world and of men you are quite ignorant; and Paul—he is good and true I know—but still, hearts are treacherous things."

"What did you mean?" she asked suddenly, "by saying that she had heard of me? How could she, and what have I to do with her?"

"Nothing, of course," he answered readily. "But it implies that Paul is only trying to get rid of her in order to marry again. The lawyers, they are sure to make the most of it. Now if I know anything of Paul, he will never allow your name to be dragged into the case, consequently he will have to withdraw it altogether, also consequently he will not get his freedom."

Sheba pushed the dark hair from her brow in a bewildered sort of way. "How strange they seem, these marriage laws," she said. "How could men make them?"

"That is hard to say, *meine liebe*. I think, myself, they made them to break them. That is what the world seems to convey when you study its inconsistencies."

"I wish," she said wearily, "I knew more. I have never heard, never learnt what that great world of men and women do. I cannot understand how any one can vow to love a person and then change. It seems to me that no *law* can make any difference."

"Oh, but it does," said Müller with his grim laugh. "The greatest difference. It binds men to keep their word to women. Experience shows there are plenty who would not, if the law did not force them."

"Then," said the girl proudly, "their love cannot be worth the having."

"Doubtless," he said, as he slowly filled the big pipe once more, "but they are just the largest class. Women are so foolish where they love, and so generous and so blind sometimes; and you see nature has not balanced the sexes equally. The weakest always suffers most. True, there are women who have given themselves to a man for love's sake only, and never repented it, or been *made* to repent it, but they are very rare exceptions. Man is less generous and less constant by nature. Therefore it is as well that the law fences him in with certain restrictions."

"Is change a law of men's love?" she asked dreamily. "I

know in all the stories and all the books I have read about it there is change. It never seems to last. Is real life like that?"

"Real life is what we choose to make it," he said curtly. "There is no need to change if one is sure that one loves nobly and truly; but men, they love for beauty, for witchery, for inaccessibility, for devilry, I often think, and then—the end is always the same—a spoilt life, a crime, or a cruelty, and a despair that the grave alone can end."

She shivered suddenly in the burning sultry heat of the noon-day. "It sounds terrible," she said. "And when one gives all one's heart, one's soul, one's life——"

"That is the worst," he said, "and I am afraid you are just one of those who would do that; afraid, nay, of it I am quite sure, and was sure from the first hour I looked into those great serious eyes, that speak for your soul."

"But Paul loves me truly," she said very low, and with the faint warm colour stealing back into her pale face. "I am sure I can trust him."

"Yes," said the old man thoughtfully, "he loves you truly, but I wish it were possible for him to marry you to-morrow. It is the long, weary waiting, the hope deferred, the sickening, slow suspense . . . that is what I dread for him . . . and you see the light of fame is a fierce thing; it shows up even what one would wish to conceal. He has left this opera company, but he will have other offers; indeed, he has had them. It will not be possible for him to live unknown and retired like this for very long, not unless he sacrifices his profession, and becomes a farmer or a cattle breeder."

She grew pale and anxious, and for the first time a thought crossed her mind to disturb its innocent tranquillity. "Is it my fault? Am I doing him harm?" she said huskily. "Don't be afraid to tell me. I—I would not have him suffer for all the world could offer."

"My dear," said the old German hurriedly, and with something of emotion in his face, "do not fancy such a thing for a moment. You are not to blame. You cannot help loving each other. It is what fate intended you to do. There are two things man's strength can never conquer, nor all his knowledge help him to evade. They are Love and Death. I seem to sit apart and look on your two lives, young, gifted, passionate, hopeful, and I have never looked on such lives but the curse and woe of sorrow and suffering have set their seal upon them. You may be different; I cannot tell; but I often find it in my heart to wish that Paul Meredith's life had never crossed yours."

"Do not say that," she cried passionately. "My life seemed never a life at all till I knew him. He has made it so happy that even if—if he should change, as you say men do, I would still have enough to thank him for in all the years to come."

"In all the years to come," echoed the old man. "You do not know what they may bring for this life, or the afterwards. Can death rob us of memory? It seems to me that love has an after life, eternal as the soul. So poets say, but the beauty of a theory does not prove its truth. Paul's soul may live again, and yet again, and have no memory of yours, or of his love for you."

She shuddered. "You are cruel," she said, "and your theories are more comfortless than the creeds you have disproved. If forgetfulness is death's only gift, why should we not seize any joy that presents itself here? What restrains us?"

"I don't know," he said with his grim laugh, "unless it is fear of consequences."

"That," she said, "would be only the argument of a coward."

Müller rose abruptly. "Do not tell Paul so," he said. "Few men are worth a great love . . . I don't say he is not . . . still men are but mortal . . . and you women, you will worship your idols as pure gold, and never see the foot of clay."

She smiled, though her mouth quivered a little with the passionate emotion that her words had betrayed.

"Is he my idol?" she said softly. "I hope not; that would be unwise."

"And pray when was love ever anything else?" said Müller roughly, as he left the verandah, and went within.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"A STRUGGLE."

THE girl sat there after he had left her—her hands clasped on her knee, her eyes wide and strained and sorrowful, fixed on the dull green of the distant trees. The heavy scents of the flowers stole in on the faint sultry breeze. The birds' notes were hushed, the stillness was intense, and would have been as peaceful as its intensity, but for the pain that lay at her heart and sent its sting through the vague recurring thoughts that filled her brain.

Had she erred? had she been bold and unwomanly in that she had so readily confessed her love and fled to her lover? Was she adding to his troubles and injuring his future by her presence? By the light that Müller's words threw on their actions it seemed to be so.

True, God made hearts; but man made the laws that ruled them—and those laws she had utterly disregarded; she loved him so deeply, so utterly, so entirely that she had not given a thought to anything else but that love. She was absolutely content with the knowledge that he was near her, and that every day brought with it the joy of his presence. On that joy she could have lived

and asked no other gift or good of Fate. But what did Müller mean when he said that the fact of her being here, under his roof, might be prejudicial both to her love and herself?

She went over again the details of that hateful story learnt from Paul's own lips.

Somehow she had never seemed to recognize the woman who had been almost his murderess as his wife, as having a legal claim or right to him, that could hold them apart for long and bitter years.

Paul had spoken so lightly, so coldly of that claim—had seemed to think it would be so easy to strike off those fetters, and yet now they threatened to hold him forcibly.

He had said that the moment he was free they should be wedded. But he was not free, and to-day, for the first time, she found herself facing the question as to what that freedom meant.

She had never read the Marriage Service, but some faint, misty memory was in her mind of words that said, "What God hath joined, let no man put asunder." Yet, according to Paul, man was able to put asunder husband and wife, and according to Müller not love, but *law* sanctified their union and kept them true to plighted vows, and this—freedom—that was to give Paul to her—what was it, she wondered, and was she doing right to accept it? There was no one to ask or to advise her, and her brain ached with the bewilderment of these new thoughts. Right—wrong—there they came back again—the old hateful, puzzling words. Right meant duty, and one phase of duty meant obedience to parents; but her parents would have sold her into a dishonourable bondage, and have done it, too, by a cruel and shameless trick. Was she undutiful because she had saved herself? Right or wrong? Well, there seemed no question of wrong in a love so pure and heart-whole and undivided as the love she felt for Paul Meredith.

Love—to a woman—is a "liberal education," and will teach her in an hour what days and years of a loveless philosophy could never accomplish.

Of late, existence had looked to her so full of beautiful possibilities that she had told herself, "At last I shall be happy." Now, it suddenly seemed as if happiness was once more drifting into a debatable land, thick-set with the thorns and briars of doubt and tempting.

Yet what could she do? She had thrown in her lot with these friends she had found in that awful time of desperation. But for that unlucky chance of Meredith's appearance in Adelaide she might now have been his wife—nothing could have parted or come between them.

His wife. As she said the words to herself a sudden light seemed to flash into her mind. His *wife*—how could that be? a man cannot have two wives, and Paul's wife was this woman who seemed to

have sprung out of silence and darkness to part them both. Of what had she been dreaming so long. What did that freedom mean of which Paul had spoken?

The law had bound them—the law could set them free . . . and yet these words were whispering to her heart with sickening reiteration: “What God hath joined let no man put asunder.”

She sprang to her feet, white and sick and terrified. At last she saw—at last! She knew that had he been aware of this woman’s existence he would never have asked her to come to him. In common honour he could not have done so. He had deemed himself quite free, and she had believed the same, and now a great and terrible barrier had arisen between them. She had no right to live under his roof—no claim even on his love, while the other lived and bore his name and, for aught she knew, might be able to take him from her even now.

This was what Müller meant. This must have been what he was endeavouring to convey when he spoke of complications—of the fact of her living under Paul’s roof and protection being already known and placed to his discredit.

She thought of those happy months—the peace, the delight, the perfect unquestioning bliss that had wrapped her in its blind content; nothing—not one whisper of doubt had intruded on her passive acceptance of it all; and yet, for the first time, she began to ask herself, “Was it wrong; and had Paul known it?” She started from her chair as if the thought had stung her into sudden life. She looked around as one startled into wakefulness after some vivid or beautiful dream, might look.

Her mind was trying to disentangle itself from a confused web of memories, incidents, facts; and to grasp from among them one truth, terrible alike in its pain and disenchantment.

It was not of worldly reasoning, of moral arguments, of prudence or self-restraint that she thought now. Her love had been to her the only law she had desired to follow—but then that love had looked pure, sinless, unblamable till a few moments ago. Now, what had chanced; what had come to her?

She could not tell as yet; she was only conscious of pain and bewilderment, only capable of recognizing that she had given way to feelings which had needed restraint, and faced her now with accusations of blind selfishness, and blinder passion which had been her own wilful choice.

In an agony of shame and terror she covered her face with her hands and sank back on the chair. “Oh, Paul—Paul!” she cried brokenly. “You might have told—you might have helped me . . .”

Ere the sob that ended those broken words had died into silence, a hand was laid on her shoulders and the name on which she had called was echoed back: “What should Paul have told you, Sheba—and what is grieving you now?”

Her hands dropped; she lifted her troubled face to his: "Oh, Paul!" she cried brokenly, "I should not be here. Why did you not tell me?"

His face darkened and grew stern. "It has come—at last," he thought. "I—I do not understand you, Sheba," he said aloud; "what do you mean?"

"I mean," said the girl in a low voice that she vainly tried to steady, "that I have heard what the lawyers wrote to you from Melbourne. Ah, Paul! even you will hardly believe me, perhaps, but all this time I never seem to have recognized the fact that this woman is legally your wife—that I have no right, no claim on you; and all this time I have been living under your roof . . . and she—she has found it out, and that gives her some equal right to defend herself. Oh! I know I am ignorant and stupid—I don't know about the world or what it says, and I care less; but something . . . something tells me I have done wrong; I ought not to be here—I ought not, perhaps, to have loved you—but that I could not help."

"Sheba!"—so stern—so cold—so strange a voice it was, that for a moment the girl raised her eyes in pained and questioning wonder. "Sheba—what has come to you? Why do you say such words? Do you want to make me *feel* the villain that I look in the eyes of those who know nothing of what led to this?—You knew the story—you knew it in the first hour of my own discovery. You know too that freedom is a mere question of time or legal quibbling. I have a perfect right to it . . . Why do you speak as if it were some new wrong you had discovered?"

"Because," she said sadly, "it seems to be wrong. I cannot tell why or how it has all come to me—but not till an hour ago did I fully realize that this woman is your wife . . . your *wife*, Paul—and that while she lives I have no right to you whatever."

"In God's name, Sheba," he cried passionately, "do not *you* talk such folly. It is the cant of a hypocritical virtue that should have no place in your pure and candid soul. My wife—a murderess—an adulteress—a woman who dishonours the very sex she owns! No—a hundred laws could never make me acknowledge her."

"Tell me one thing, Paul," said the girl gently. "If you had known she lived—would you—that day—when you spoke of love for me first—would you have said what you said then?"

"Why ask such questions?" he said impatiently. "The fact that she was alive could not have altered my love for you . . . but I might not have confessed it."

"And I should not have been—here," said Sheba slowly and with effort. "You see, Paul, what I mean. When one is ignorant, one may err unconsciously, but when one *knows* . . . that alters everything."

"But, dearest," he said more gently than he had yet spoken, what is the use of bringing up these questions now? We agreed to bear our lives—apart—until the day came when I should be free to make you mine. Have I not explained to you that a woman who deserts her husband for . . . for another man—has no further claim on him? I was too poor to attempt to get justice or freedom for myself when she left me—and afterwards I heard she was dead and was fool enough to believe it. I had made up my mind never to have anything to do with women again; . . . as for another marriage . . . it seemed the last thing on earth I should ever desire. How could I tell that my passive acceptance of dishonour would be brought up against me like this? We are such tools of Fate after all! Still things are bound to come to a definite conclusion soon. Why need you distress yourself about it in this fashion? Müller had no right to tell you——"

"I think," she said, in the same sad, hopeless way, "he told me out of pity for my own ignorance."

He looked at her—the blood dyed his face—his eyes grew dark and defiant. "Do you repent your trust?" he said. "Why should there be any difference now between us?"

"I—don't know," she said, the pain in her eyes growing deeper and more intense as with some inward struggle. "My trust . . . Oh, that has nothing to do with the way in which everything has altered. I suppose I should have loved you, even had I known . . . but I never seemed really to know or realize what I have done till—till just this last hour."

"But what is it?" he asked half fearfully, "that you realize?"

The colour came back to her face—then as suddenly ebbed away; her frank beautiful eyes sank before his gaze. "That I have no right—here," she said. "That my living under your roof has placed us both in a false position and given—her—the right to accuse you of the very infidelity on which you found your own claim for freedom."

He started to his feet. "Curse that meddling German," he muttered passionately. "How dared he tell you that?"

"It was right I should know," the girl said wearily. "I have been blind too long . . . and it was such a foolish, selfish blindness. Who would believe it?—no one—no one."

"Do not speak so sadly," he entreated. "God knows I suffer enough. I told you that one day you would blame me . . . but I did not know it would be so soon."

The wretchedness and hopelessness of his voice went to her heart. "I do not blame you," she said. "It is all my own fault—all. It was I who told you I must leave home. I—I could not bear the life any longer. You were not to blame because I fled to you as . . . as I did. It was just one of my old mad impulses. My mother always said they would be my ruin."

"But that," he said gently, "is all over and done with. Why go back to it—and why make more evils. You treat this discovery as if it were a new thing; but it is not; nothing has altered since that day I had to confess my miserable history to you, and you were so brave and so forgiving."

"Yes, Paul," she said, "something *has* changed. You spoke lightly of this tie—as something to be easily broken—without right or obligation, but now, you see it is quite different, or there would have been no defence—on *her* part . . . and I . . . you see it is already known that you wish to rid yourself of one woman only to marry another. Oh, it sounds horrible . . . I—I never knew what it all represented till to-day."

"And knowing it," he said, "what will you do? How does it alter our position?"

She unclasped her hands—she looked from side to side as some trapped creature looks who seeks escape.

"It does alter it," she cried, her voice low and tremulous with agitation. "It alters it because now I see I am acting wrongly, and that my presence is harmful to you."

"No, Sheba," he said; "that is not true."

"I think," she said gravely, "you will find it in the lawyer's letter to you . . . and in any case I *feel* it."

"You cannot love me very much to speak so coldly," he said with angry impatience, because he knew she was speaking the truth and was unable to contradict her.

"It is no question of my love, Paul," she answered gently. "Because nothing can alter that—nothing—even though all our lives we are strangers, or apart."

He started to his feet: "Strangers," he cried stormily; "never use that word to me, Sheba—strangers, you and I—impossible, I have given you all my heart . . . you know it. I thought you at least were strong and true and noble . . . are you going to turn out just like other women when a little trouble or difficulty threatens their love? What did you tell me only last night? you would always say what I wished . . . Well . . . if you love me you must say you will *never* leave me—never—never. Do you hear me, Sheba?"

"Let me think," she entreated. "You are not fair to me, Paul—you carry me beyond my strength; you know that with you I am not mistress of myself—I grow weak and foolish and forgetful—"

"Grow what you will," he interrupted, "but hear me now and—mind—I mean every word I say. Of your own free will you came to me and now—I *mean* to keep you. You promised to throw in your fate with mine—by that promise I hold you until happier times. They will come—only, be patient. Why," and he laughed bitterly, "what folly all this is—what has come over us both? You must remain. Where could you go? What could you do?"

And even if it were a question of waiting twelve months, or twelve years, nothing worse could be said than has been said of these three months that are past."

"Oh, Paul, is that true?" she cried faintly.

"True—of course it is true. My dearest, don't look so unhappy. Think of last night . . . you can't have forgotten those hours, Sheba? And the future may have many such—if we will." He dropped into the chair beside her and took her hand. She lifted that sad, perplexed young face to his and its mute suffering smote him to the heart. "I know what you mean," he said hurriedly. "I know that for the first time you realize your position and feel it to be a false one. I would have shielded you from that knowledge had it been possible—but even as it is, what difference can it make? What is the world to us? Why should we care for what it says?"

"Oh," she said. "It is not the world—what is the world when one loves as I love you, Paul?"

"And I only want your love, my dearest. The day for scruples and objections is past and over—our hearts must be our law henceforth. The love I feel for you, Sheba, is sacred to me as any marriage rite. Can you not believe it and trust me still?"

"I have never ceased to trust you," she said brokenly; "but if my love for you is a wrong towards others . . . towards yourself?"

"It is *not*," he cried passionately; "put that idea out of your mind for ever. I deemed myself free, and in a moral and equitable sense I am free. Free to love you—free to taste happiness once more after all these blank and wretched years. I have sworn to give all my present and all my future to you; to be true to you as never man was true. In return, I only ask that between us there shall be no doubt, no question of any other interference, otherwise I shall know you do not love me as I *want* to be loved, as I believed you capable of loving."

The colour flushed her cheeks as she listened to those passionate words. Never before had he spoken as he spoke now. His hand closed on hers—his heart beat so loudly she could hear it in that sultry noonday stillness.

For a moment she could frame no words; her eyes drooped—her lips quivered. A sudden faintness and dreaminess stole over her, lulling to rest the pain and doubts of this last hour. Had not her whole life been a dream of such love—a prayer and cry for it?—and now it was hers . . . hers to hold for all her life to come, hers in the fulness and richness of adoration, and truth, and perfect trust.

He read the change in her face—he saw the eloquence and glory and passion in those eyes upraised to his for one brief moment—then veiled and hidden by a shy and sudden shame. He bent closer to her and his lips rested on her soft rich hair.

"Why should we deny ourselves happiness?" he said. "Who will thank us—or who will care for what we suffer? I have scarcely dared speak to you, or meet you—or kiss you; and who is the better for my abstinence? I have been patient because freedom seemed so easy and so sure, and now—I am asked to believe in this legal farce that threatens to keep you from me. Ah! my Sheba, turn your face to me again, and believe me when I tell you that in all the few brief years of life we count as ours, there is but one good thing, and that is love—such love as has come to us both. Shall we deny it, refuse it, reject it? Surely we would be worse than fools to do that. Rather let us take all the comfort and all the delight it can give us—hold it as our most precious possession. Life will give us nothing better—nothing half so good."

Her head drooped on his breast, his lips met hers. With that touch the ignorance of childhood left Sheba Ormatroyd for ever. Before her dazzled sight there gleamed the golden apples of temptation, and of knowledge of good and evil.

(To be continued.)

LONDON LETTERS,

TO VARIOUS COUNTRY COUSINS.

No. III.

DEAR COUSINS,

Since last I wrote to you, how much has happened! Ascot, Sandown, Kempton, the Shah, Henley, and the two great cricket matches. Why do not things spread themselves out a little more evenly, instead of always coming in battalions, with long intervals between? I feel as if I had had no breathing time for the last three weeks at least, and Mary and Lucy announce that so much sightseeing has given them a mental indigestion.

Over all our amusements the glorious weather has cast a pleasant spell, and the heat has made white the colour of the season, with yellow for its aide-de-camp. There has been more white worn in these last three months than in three whole years previous to them. Both in evening and afternoon it has been general. The two bride duchesses have adopted it on almost every occasion when they have been seen in public. It suits Her Grace, of Portland splendidly, even quite as well as her favourite "old pink"—just the tint of a Rothschild carnation, the larger and darker variety of the delicious Malmaison.

Pale grey is the next favourite hue for dresses, and you will all be perfectly safe, cousins, in braiding or embroidering the etceteras of grey dresses for yourselves during the long winter evenings—or you may venture on white and gold or pale yellow. Even if next summer should be sunless as was last, a white serge or cashmere with gold trimmings is sure to be useful. Dressmakers are so disappointing about punctuality and a good fit, to say nothing of tremendous charges and endless weary tryings-on, that we three have resolved to try to do without them. We mean to buy pretty costumes and fit them to our own figures. We are, unfortunately, not "stock sizes," as an individual in a mantle shop solemnly informed us one day. I cannot regret that we are not, inconvenient as it is not to be able to buy ready-made mantles. The chief characteristics of the "stock" figure seem to be shortness of waist, narrowness of chest, and a painful, wooden want of curve in the back. Now, we three are neatly finished in these respects, and when the man in the frockcoat of commerce told us with a serious air that we were not "stock sizes," we all startled him by

enjoying a little genuine laugh. Between you and me, I don't think many people really fit these ready-made garments. I once met a girl who fitted a ready-made coat. She was not a prettily outlined girl, and she was deceitful, for she got hold of one of Redfern's name-braids somewhere, and sewed it inside her ready-made coat, so as to pretend that it came from his house. We are also going in large for the pretty, neat skirts made by the Patent Shapely Skirt Association in Gloucester Road. They hang well and are beautifully light, whether one has a draped skirt or a shooting dress. I prefer the latter, because the folds are all straight from the waist.

By-the-way, Redfern's new little cloth capes with three folds and raw edges are the most comfortable additions to a light summer toilet that you can imagine. Though very light, they are warm, being lined with shot silk, and their appearance is of the smart order. One or two appeared at the Marlborough House garden-party and a great number at the Hatfield entertainment of the same kind. One delightful circumstance about them is that they require no adjustment, being lightly cast about the shoulders with one end thrown over towards the back.

You have read all about the Shah's visit in the papers of course? You ought to read the papers, you know. If you do not, you will be ignorant of the history of your own times. You need not so conscientiously peruse them as to include the police news, the details of divorce cases, or even trials for murder. These are unnecessary to your mental development, and though your interest in human nature and its phases may tempt you to peruse them, you must rigidly confine yourselves to the telegrams, the leading articles and the columns descriptive of such public events as the visit of the Shah. I should like to tell you how we saw him, and what we thought of him; but it would all be simply repetition of what you have read. Mary says he is very handsome, and Lucy thinks him ugly. It is impossible to account for such varied impressions.

London was wonderfully full and gay during his visit; in fact, we have had a most remarkably brilliant season, partly owing to the Paris exhibition, which brought the Americans over here in shoals. A gentleman belonging to that country said to me that his nation liked to visit Paris, but to stay in London. Was it not a prettily put compliment to the city in which it was uttered? I felt inclined to ask him if he would reverse it when he was talking to a Parisian. It was too cruel a thought to express, however.

Henley saw the apotheosis of the shirt feminine this year. Has that manly little garment yet invaded your ruralities? Some girls look nice in them: others have the appearance of having "gormed," but failed to digest, the family poker. I notice that when a girl has donned a shirt she invariably puts on a manly tread, and her elbows take a masculine turn. I really took Lucy

for a policeman the other morning, with such rhythmed emphasis did she come along the hall. It was only the influence of the shirt. You will observe the same thing when your neighbours begin to wear it. Do get a wide belt before you put one on; it makes a greater difference than you can imagine.

If you wish to be economical, good girls in training for curates' wives, or some similar doom, get hats made of rose-stems (gutta-percha dyed green, and run through with an internal wire), and you can change the flowers in it as often as you like to suit your different dresses. I expect you to feel a little grateful to me for giving you this idea. If you wish to be parsimonious, you can buy white flowers, which will go with everything but cream colour. These hats are very pretty, though little protection against the sun, and less against the rain. The flecked shadows the gutta-percha rose-stems throw upon the brow and eyes when the light is good add a siren sweetness to both.

Let me tell you of two excellent ideas for a party which were adopted recently by a hostess. One was to have the doors taken off the hinges, and carried away; this made ingress and egress to the rooms very easy and convenient, besides adding considerably to the available space. Another excellent plan was the providing of a platform raised some inches from the floor, and soon knocked up by a carpenter. On this stood the performers who sang or recited, and there was no difficulty in seeing them from all parts of the room. As a rule, a drawing-room audience can see but little, except that small portion of it which has secured front places. Nor do the performers like the spectators to crowd in too closely upon them. They prefer a clear space in front, so that they may not seem to be addressing two or three people who have taken their stand immediately in front of them.

Dear cousins, never dare to give an afternoon party without hiring hat shelves. If you do, the men you invite will detest you. There is nothing—absolutely *nothing*—about which they are more sensitive than their hats. Some of them are equally sensitive about their collars, but they are *all* extremely particular about their headgear. These hat shelves are fitted up in a few moments, consisting merely of two uprights with shelves between, covered with baize. Each shelf takes four or five hats and cherishes them with tender care while their owner is absent and hatless. Some hostesses take much thought for their guests, studying their comfort in these little ways. Others do *not*. You will find that the former are those who give the successful parties, and whose guests seldom plead that frequently mythical excuse, “a previous engagement.” And after all, social success depends more largely on these things than any inexperienced person would imagine. I am not of the cynical set who believe that to be a social success, one must be more or less a moral failure. It sounds smart and epigrammatic, but it is not true.

C. E. H.

LONDON SOCIETY.

SEPTEMBER, 1889.

A NEW OTHELLO.

A NOVEL.

By IZA DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE, HONOUR AND OBEDY," "NOT EASILY JEALOUS," "ONLY A LOVE STORY,"
"LOVE IN IDLENESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER X.

"ALAS! HOW EASILY THINGS GO WRONG."

"Yes, I was mad—I know it! I was mad!
For there is madness in the looks of love!
And he who frights a tender brooding dove
Is not more base than I, and not so sad!"

* * * * *

"Absolve me, sweet! Absolve me, or I die!"

THE London season wore on to its close, and London society scattered as usual—dispersed to moor and mountain, to lake-land and sea shore.

The Percival family divided themselves amongst various country houses; they were popular people, with many friends and more invitations than they could accept even by their usual process of division. Amongst other visits, Geoffrey went down to Westholme, the Rockleighs' place, where he would have enjoyed himself much more if Algernon Vesey had not also been there, and also a favoured guest. Ray went up to Scotland, but made a much shorter stay among the heather than was his wont when he paid a visit north. As a rule he was fond of change and travelling, generally eager to start off as soon as August came, and reluctant to settle again in London until well on into the autumn. This season he entered with less than ordinary zest into the discussions on the summer plans; he talked of running over to Brittany, or to Switzerland and the Tyrol, but procrastinated, and

showed little or none of his usual eagerness and pleasure in the prospect.

Mrs. Percival thought he was not looking well; she wondered whether sea-bathing or mountain air would be the best thing to set him up, and was undecided which to urge upon him. He resented, as is frequently the wont of mankind, any questionings about his health; indeed, one thing which convinced his mother that something ailed her Ray was his uncertainty of spirits and temper. He was occasionally impatient and irritable, then silent and depressed; his naturally buoyant gaiety seemed often forced, and little things ruffled him.

"What makes Ray so cross, Momie?" Rhoda asked one day with a pettish, pouting look.

"Ray is *not* cross, darling," replied Mrs. Percival with an air of mild reproach. "You do not understand him; but you know very well, Rhoda, that your brother has one of the sweetest tempers in the world—none of us have ever had an unkind word from him. You cannot call it 'cross,' dear child, if he is not always in a mood to be teased by you girls. If he seems a little petulant, it must be that something has happened to put him out, or else he is not well."

For Prince Ray could do no wrong in his mother's eyes.

After having paid two or three flying visits to different country houses, which somehow bored him now, though they had never bored him in his life before, Ray at last made up his mind, though it was now getting late in the holiday season, to take a six weeks' trip to Switzerland and the Tyrol. The Fitzallans had stayed all this time in the social desert of London, only running down every week to Brighton, where Dr. Fitzallan had several patients.

Whilst Ray was planning his tour in the Tyrol, a certain letter arrived from over seas for Mrs. Fitzallan, which called *her* far away in an opposite direction. When Ray heard this he was glad that he had decided to go on the Continent, for London—nay, England—would seem empty without her! Even when he did not see her, the very atmosphere of the city wherein she was seemed to him different to that of the place where she was *not*. And then perhaps, he thought—who could tell—might not out of sight prove a step towards out of mind? Was it not possible, even probable, that change, travel, absence, distance, the knowledge that she was far away, might help him to get over this hopeless craze of constantly dreaming, thinking, brooding on the vision of an unattainable woman who stood, pure and far off, beyond the reach of his wildest dreams?

The letter which effected such a change in the Fitzallans' autumn plans concerned the only wealthy relative Asenath possessed, one David Keppel, living in Canada, a somewhat eccentric uncle, millionaire and miser, a childless widower, with, however, a goodly half-dozen of nephews and nieces

and cousins, all willing to pay him filial attentions. Of these relatives, Asenath had been one of his especial favourites, but he had not chosen to approve of her marriage, which led to some little coolness for a time. It had, however, caused no permanent breach between uncle and niece; he was indeed less angry with the girl for contracting, than with his sister-in-law for allowing her to contract what he not unreasonably regarded—considering her youth and beauty—as a bad match.

Now one of Asenath's cousins wrote by Mr. Keppel's desire to inform her of his dangerous illness—dangerous, although the peril was not immediate. The best doctors in Quebec were treating him, but held out little or no hope of his recovery; they thought he would live several weeks, but did not think it possible he could last out two months. He had talked a great deal of Asenath, his favourite brother's child, expressed regret at her absence and a desire to see her, and wished his critical condition to be communicated to her.

Such an intimation on the part of a rich relative is not to be disregarded, more especially when one of the well-known characteristics of the said relative is a certain changeableness of intent as to the disposal of his property. This was the case with Mr. Keppel; he had a way of destroying old wills and making new ones, which was very annoying to his legatees. So far as the Fitzallans knew, Asenath's name had no place in his at present latest will; but there was no knowing whether this would remain his latest, and it was certainly probable that a niece's devotion, manifested by her taking so long a journey to be by her afflicted relative's side, would be recognized by at least the addition of a codicil. This was Dr. Fitzallan's view, and he did not hesitate to express his opinion firmly and freely.

"It is not a chance to be thrown away, Asenath," he said. "I could accompany you, of course, if you wished it, but the old man always received me rather gruffly, and I do not think my presence there would be any advantage—rather the reverse. Then I am just getting on very satisfactorily here—two new patients, capital cases, this week; and there is my pamphlet to finish, and the preparation of my lectures. Altogether, the indications seem to be for me to stay and you to go. But have you no wishes of your own, Asenath? Surely you can speak for yourself!"

"I hardly know what I wish," she answered slowly. "I should like to see poor Uncle David again. I should be sorry for him to die without my seeing him. But yet—I can scarcely say that I thoroughly wish to go!"

"You would see more clearly what to do if you had cultivated the sense of susceptibility to outside influences. You have not studied how to read and when to yield to the indications all around us. Now I have marked out a certain line for myself—a bold one, I know—but influences outside myself pointed and guided me to

it. And I shall abide by it—and it will be the worse for whatever or whoever stops me. You can help me in my career, Asenath—your uncle's dollars would smooth our path to the brilliant success I *mean to make*; the want of them will not prevent it, but the possession of them will help and hasten it. It is in your interests as well as in my own I speak. We rise or fall together, you and I!"

"Yes," she assented quietly.

"You have no foolish fear of the voyage alone?" he said; "you are not of the 'clinging ivy' kind of women who can't take a step without their husband's arm."

"No."

"Can't you say something more than 'yes' and 'no?'" he said impatiently. "If you have any feeling in this matter, Asenath, tell me so plainly. Promptings and presentiments are not to be ignored; but we must be careful to distinguish real promptings from mere fancies and personal impulses. Our lives are not in our own hands. A destiny shapes the ends that we can only rough-hew. All we can is to hew them to the best of our ability. If you have any instinct or feeling that sets you against undertaking this journey, Asenath, tell me so now."

"No, I have no such feeling. Only——"

"Well—don't hesitate. Only, what?"

"If Uncle David were a poor man, I know that my going to him would not be thought of," she admitted with evident reluctance. "And I own that I do not quite like the idea——" she hesitated again.

"Of doing your plain simple duty by all the laws of common good sense!" he finished her sentence for her. "No! of course you do not! When did you ever like any idea of taking your share in the reasonable responsibilities of life? It is enough for a thing to be practical good sense for you to set yourself up against it with some puling, twaddling sentimentality; but now you really surpass yourself! You will not go to your dying uncle because he is rich!"

"I did not say I would not go," she replied coldly.

"No—you only 'don't like the idea!' of mercenary motives—worldly views; I know all the rubbish you would talk if I would listen! You will go, then?"

"Yes, I will go—on the next steamer if you like."

"Very well. I'll see about your passage immediately. You'll have plenty of time to talk any amount of conscientious twaddle to yourself, only don't bother me with it; though after all I oughtn't to object to your fits of maudlin sentiment, as they are the nearest approach to feeling you possess. One can't expect any more of a wax doll than *ma-ma-ma*—and one must be thankful for the small mercy of any articulate expression at all!"

Asenath seldom bandied words with her husband. She generally accepted his bitter gibes as silently as the waxen image to which

he likened her—only nothing could well be less “waxen” than the quality of her unyielding silence. The frequent taunts aimed at her want of feeling only had the effect of making her seem colder. She was alike too self-contained, too proud, and too really sensitive beneath her superficial impassiveness, to reply to them with protest and demonstration; she was too honest to feign a warmth she did not feel. The more he gibed at her coldness, the deeper that coldness froze over the surface of her nature; while his taunts gathered ever-increasing bitterness from his memory of a day before that crust of ice had closed over her, when the fierce fervour of his wooing had carried by storm her girlish romantic fancy, if not all her heart and soul; when the wakening warmth of womanhood had shone through her maiden shyness and serenity, as the rose-light glows through a white Parian lamp. And he did not remember that he had been the first to cool; he had not cherished the seed of love sown in Asenath’s heart; neither had he done anything to crush it; he had simply left it alone, to develope or to die. Nor did he realize that the very impassibility which he resented in her was partly the result of his own treatment of her, partly of the deep and radical want of congeniality between their two natures. The glamour of passion on his side, of dazzled yielding and response on hers, had led them to rush blindly into marriage without real sympathy; and these two souls could no more mingle than oil and water. However, although their wedded life was not a waveless stream, Gervas Fitzallan had implicit faith in his wife. He knew her—or thought he knew her—to be coldly pure and passionlessly true. He knew her dutiful, conscientious, and obedient to his reasonable desires. He knew that her good fortune would be his; he was gratified that she was going to Quebec; and had every intention of keeping on the best of terms with her and sending her off in good humour. Her passage was taken on the next week’s steamer.

The evening before she left London, the Fitzallans dined with the Percivals. Two of the usual family party were absent, Geoffrey and Gertrude, who were in the country; but one of the vacant places was filled by Kate Dundas’s faithful, although as yet undeclared, admirer, Dr. Barnabas Grey. Of course he paired off with the object of his admiration; Dr. Fitzallan naturally took his hostess, Mrs. Percival; this left Ray to Mrs. Fitzallan, who had not, however, a very conversational or entertaining partner.

Ray felt moody and out of sorts and was trying to make himself believe that he did not know why, when all the while in his heart he knew too well. It was the last evening that he should see Asenath Fitzallan for—who could tell how long? She seemed uncertain about the date of her return; when they asked her how long she expected to remain in Canada, she said she supposed she should stay with her uncle through the crisis of his illness. Who could tell when they might meet again? thought Ray. Perhaps

it would be better for him if they never did meet again! And yet the bare idea of her passing out of his life for ever, sent a fever of rebellious passion surging through his veins.

Her presence had grown now to be oftentimes a positive torture to him; but the aching desolation of her absence would be worse, he knew that by the chilly forecast that fell on him like an icy, black shadow to-night, when he forced himself to contemplate the idea. Even if her presence kindled a devouring fire at his heart, it seemed to him to-night that it was better to be burnt than frozen!

The rest of the party were full of lively chat, laughing over mild jokelets—mostly those little daily familiar standard jests which happy families keep in stock; and Ray endeavoured to bear his part—to talk and laugh as usual with them; but he felt that his head was dazed:

“His heart was fire and ice.”

He almost hated Asenath Fitzallan for her power over him, and her indifference to it, nay, worse, her utter unconsciousness of it. He knew he must not allow his eyes to dwell with too open admiration on that “cold and clear-cut face,” whose like the world did not hold for him, but he could not help his glance wandering towards it with reluctant fascination; its statuesque tranquillity half maddened him; he raged inwardly against the impassive serenity of her smile—the cold sweetness of her voice. And her eyes! were there ever eyes like those deep sea-grey eyes of hers!

“Full of clear light and fire and large repose!”

Was that repose never broken up? that clear light never troubled? She did not dream, did not think, did not care what *he* was feeling. Care? Why, she did not care any more than if he had been a *dog*—not so much! she was fond of dogs; he was jealous of his Ponto sometimes when he saw her smoothing the satin coat, caressing the faithful brown head. She took more notice of dogs than of men. She would have thought more of *him* if he had been a poodle puppy! he said to himself bitterly.

He came back from his morose broodings to hear his mother saying in her own sweet genial voice:

“And how glad your poor old uncle will be to have you with him. I shouldn’t wonder if he gets better when he has you to nurse and take care of him!”

“Yes, my wife is an excellent nurse,” observed Dr. Fitzallan. “She has had good training, is accustomed to sickness, and knows how to preserve discipline in the sick-room. She has capital nerves; nothing excites, nor alarms, nor upsets her; no weak sympathy with the patient breaks her down. She would be in her element in an epidemic or in the hospitals in war-time. Dead,

dying, gashed, shot and hacked to pieces, she would smooth their pillows unmoved."

"I do not think you are giving me a very amiable character, Gervas," said Asenath a trifle more quickly than usual, and a light flush mantled for a moment on her cheek.

"My dear Asenath," he replied with a lofty tolerance, "would you think it a more amiable quality to cry and tremble and break down into hysterics every time there was a painful duty to perform? A nurse cannot afford the luxury of nerves!"

"That is very true; one must be calm and self-controlled for the invalid's sake," said Mrs. Percival.

"You are a very good nurse yourself, Momie," observed Kate; and indeed all the family had reason to say so, as Mary Percival's loving care alone had tended sister, brother, cousins, son and daughter, through all the ailments incidental to early life.

After dinner, while Dr. Fitzallan entertained Mrs. Percival on the lawn with a little discourse on evolution, the rest of the party paired off and strolled round the garden. Dr. Grey and Kate wandered down to the Lower Depths; Ray and Mrs. Fitzallan sauntered along Shady Walk, while Eileen and Rhoda, busy in some girlish gossip of their own, kept a little apart from both the other couples.

"So you are an ideal nurse," observed Ray, harking back to the dinner-table conversation. "And I should have thought you were, even without being told so."

"Would you? You have had no chance of judging."

"I can see the way you move, so softly and smoothly; I can hear your voice, so gentle and soothing. And then you—you would always be calm and self-contained, cool and unmoved. You wouldn't mind the sight of suffering."

"I should not run away from it, certainly, if I could relieve it," she replied with a little, only a very little, touch of surprise at what seemed to her the causeless bitterness which betrayed itself in his tone.

"No, I am sure you would never run away from anything. But do you ever—ever *feel* anything? You look as if you never did!"

"Those people are the most fortunate who do not feel too much," she replied, avoiding a direct answer to his question. "They can be the most useful too; there is nothing incapacitates one more than excess of feeling."

"True! it's the worst mistake in the world to let oneself be fool enough to feel anything," he agreed moodily. Asenath was silent a moment, and then returned to the subject of herself, a very unusual subject for her even to touch, still less to dwell upon.

"I do not think that people generally have quite a true idea of me," she said. "I suppose I *am* cold. I have sat by a death-bed often as calmly as I am walking here now—I have watched the

great mystery of the soul departing, and wondered where it went when it vanished like a flame blown out—but all the same, I am not quite as unhuman as some people seem to think. I have often offered to help with the nursing in bad cases, not because I am so hard-hearted, but because I am sorry for people suffering, and anxious to help them all I can.”

Asenath had never spoken so much of herself or her own feelings to Ray before. Never had she seemed so near to him; yet with a sort of perversity, and perhaps also because he dared not trust himself to reply as he felt, he answered her almost brusquely :

“I shouldn’t have imagined you cared what people thought of you.”

“Perhaps I do not—much,” she said, instantly shutting herself up again in her usual shell of reserve.

“You walk above us all,” he went on, still with a touch of bitterness, “with your head held high, as if you did not care a pin whether any one hated or loved you!”

“No one does either, I think. It seems to me that I am not a person to be either hated or loved much.”

“No, I daresay not,” he agreed, in the same hard and almost harsh tone.

He really thought she was a creature to be either hated or adored; at that hour he was not at all sure which he himself was nearest to doing. He was in one of those morose and half-savage moods wherein one takes a fierce and bitter pleasure in misrepresenting one’s self. He thought of the imminent parting drawing nearer, nearer every minute; the knowledge that *she* did not care raged in him like a fever. Even the very fact that she had this evening for the first time, for just a moment, lifted for him one little corner of the clinging veil of her habitual reticence, had even betrayed a touch of unconscious regard for his opinion of her, this now was only tantalizing, maddening, as would be one tiny drop of water just touching the parched lip of a man dying of thirst.

Asenath accepted his prompt assent to the idea that she was “neither to be hated nor loved” as simple plain-speaking. She supposed it was true that she as a rule only inspired lukewarm feelings. Gervas had often given her to understand as much. She did not as yet suspect any under-current of passion beneath Ray’s brusque and unusual manner; she only thought he seemed in rather a morose temper. Married in early girlhood, she had not had enough of love and admiration lavished upon her in her life for her to be very quick in interpreting the signs and tokens. She was not one of those conquering beauties who sally forth to slay unwary man, who have vanquished so many that they are ready to recognize their conquests at a glance, even sometimes to suspect the victim’s heart is pierced when their arrows have really glanced aside and left him whole and sound.

Asenath's beauty was of a type which, while almost universally acknowledged, was merely recognized with calm and critical appreciation by the many, and only inspired enthusiasm in the few. She knew that her face was fair; but there was nothing in the world that she expected less than for men to fall victims to her charms. Ray found that this very unconsciousness of hers poured oil upon the smouldering fire that burnt in him, which he was striving in vain to smother and trample out. The struggle was torture. He felt that she was stretching him on the rack, and she not only did not care, she did not even know what she was doing.

They had strolled down to the shady path known as the Lower Depths, while Dr. Grey and Kate had passed up to Shady Walk. Presently the latter couple went on to the upper terrace; and a few minutes afterwards Asenath, glancing round, no longer saw the light dresses of Eileen and Rhoda showing in pale gleams through the bushes of the upper walks. She and Ray were alone in the loneliest, darkest of the lower paths.

"Had we not better be going in too?" she suggested.

"Not just yet," he said hastily. "It is the last walk I shall have with you."

"You will have plenty of other walks with more interesting companions," she said coolly.

"Oh, yes, no doubt," he assented with bitter scoffing at his own expense. "But you see," he added, forcing a lighter tone, though he could not make it an agreeable or amiable one, "I am easily contented. I don't want any one better than you."

"A contented mind is a continual feast," she replied. "But it is really getting too chilly for me to be contented out here any longer."

"I don't want you to catch cold," he said quickly, and a little resentfully, as if her words had conveyed an aspersion on his consideration. "We'll go in."

They turned up the nearest path leading to the upper terraces. It was a steep, narrow path, overhung with drooping boughs, and fringed on one side with tall briary bushes and creepers, which here and there trespassed on the path, as these lower depths were kept in true "wilderness style."

Asenath had a lace scarf thrown over her head and round her neck and shoulders. Ray had been thinking how becoming it was to her, draped as it was with such careless and picturesque grace. As they entered the narrow path an overhanging briar caught this scarf partly off her head. She put up her hand to free it, but the thorns had got tangled in the lace and in her hair.

"Let me!" Ray exclaimed hastily, catching the offending branch and carefully disentangling it from her headgear. It had partly dragged the comb out of the heavy cable-coils of her hair; and as he gently removed the briars, a tress escaping from its restraint

fell loosened in his hand, like a thick skein of silk—soft, warm, fragrant, tempting! She could not see it! He touched it caressingly; it seemed to cling and curl round his fingers like a living thing. He could not help lifting it to his lips, unseen and unsuspected by her, and at that soft touch the smouldering fire he had been struggling to control leapt up to flame. The moonlight breaking through the canopy of branches overhead just revealed her pale, cameo-like profile and the lovely line in which the rippling hair was drawn back from her brow. On a sudden irresistible impulse he leant closer and pressed one light kiss on those soft warm tresses which curved in a gentle wave over her temple. Asenath, startled, turned and recoiled sharply from him, with a gesture more offended than alarmed. Quick as a flash, that indignant movement would have swept her away from him; but quicker still his arm thrown round her, detained her—held her fast.

Until that moment no woman of high or low degree had ever had right or reason to resent word or deed, or even look, of Ray Percival's. Until that moment he had held Asenath Fitzallan above all women sacred as a shrined saint. But now he forgot himself—lost his head; he was for the moment scarcely responsibly conscious—literally beside himself; the madness had mounted like fire to his brain, and he broke down beneath a temptation to which many a worse man would have scorned to yield.

Asenath strove indignantly to release herself, but for that one mad moment he held her in a close embrace—kissed her hair, her brow, her cheek, even dared to seek her lips. His had scarcely touched hers when she had torn herself from his arms. She did not fly from him, but turned upon him in a white heat of just resentment.

"How dare you?" she exclaimed in a low and quivering but piercing tone. She drew one quick gasping breath, as if half suffocated with wrath. "You pitiful coward!" she added when she got breath to speak again. Her voice thrilled and pulsated with concentrated passionate scorn; and she drew herself up to her full imperial height. Although he was taller than she was, in her haughty anger she seemed to look *down* upon him, as if he had been some repulsive reptile.

Ray winced beneath the scourge of her contempt as if she had lashed him across the face. Already the gust of passion that had seized him and shaken him like a reed had passed, and a horrible sense of shame and self-loathing was rising in its place. If an iron hand had clutched him by the throat, he could not have been more incapable of speech. He stood motionless, silent; his breath coming short, as the violent reaction of feeling seemed to choke him. He could not ask her to forgive him; he could not plead his love for her as extenuation of his offence—that would only be heaping another insult on her, Dr. Fitzallan's wife! He writhed beneath her scorn, but could make no answer; nor did she speak

another syllable, but turned and swept away from him with her haughtiest air.

He saw her figure vanishing among the shadows of the trees; he heard the soft rustle of her dress grow fainter, and as he watched her out of his sight, the full realization of what he had done came home to him.

In every way Asenath Fitzallan should have been, as till this fatal moment she had been, sacred to him, as pure woman and true wife. All his respect and reverence were her due; and at this time, as his mother's guest, in the sanctuary of his mother's home, "here in double trust," she should have been doubly sacred! And now, what had he done? He had seized and kissed her by force—against her will. She was his ideal, his angel and his saint! And he had insulted his ideal—degraded himself in her eyes and in his own for ever. Never in his life had Ray known what the feeling of shame was before; for if he had occasionally said or done in haste or carelessness what he regretted, he had never till now done anything to be ashamed of; and now, to his last day, he must be ashamed of this hour! For he knew that kiss snatched by force was as unmanly a robbery as if he had torn the diamonds from her ears or wrenched the rings from her fingers.

Then the recollection rushed upon him that this very hour, in which he had behaved like a ruffian to her, was his last with her! She was to start on her journey to Canada on the morrow. And she would go despising him! She would leave him with the iron of her bitter scorn rankling in his heart. In her eyes he was dishonoured and degraded—and justly, rightly so; there was the sting of it! And who could tell when—if ever!—they might meet again? When would he have a chance of washing the stain of this hour away if indeed he did not seize it now?

He must speak to her—ask her pardon—*now*. He followed her up the winding shady paths; she had reached the upper terrace; he saw her passing along the path that skirted the lawn, and he cut across the lawn to come up with her the quicker. His footsteps made no noise on the soft grass, but the moonlight cast his shadow before him and warned her of his approach. He could see that she shrank aside with a startled movement, made one hurried step as if to get past him, and then suddenly turned and faced him—turned, it seemed to him—and the idea struck him like a dagger—as one faces round upon an enemy from whom one dreads a stab in the back. His punishment was hard; if he had been a wild beast she might have started, shrunk and turned at bay, just so.

"Mrs. Fitzallan," he began—and he would not have known his own voice, it sounded so hoarse and hollow—"stay—one minute!"

"I stayed too long," she said with concentrated anger.

"Won't you—forgive me?" The words seemed to stick in his throat, but he forced himself to utter them. "I—I did not——"

"Let me pass!" she interrupted him.

On impulse he put out his hand to detain her—laid it ever so lightly on her wrist; she snatched hers away as if shaking off a touch that was contamination.

"Let me pass," she repeated, and swept away.

He followed her to the house in sullen hopeless silence, feeling guilty and defiant. He heard the cheerful voices chatting in the drawing-room as he went in—heard Dr. Fitzallan's voice; and a sudden insane desire seized him to have Fitzallan away, alone, in some lonely spot, and fight it out with him, man to man! He knew that he soundly deserved a horse-whipping at her husband's hands; and the bare idea of the possibility of Fitzallan's attempting to treat him according to his deserts roused in his breast the savage element that lies deep in us all, even in this civilized nineteenth century.

He wondered if *she* would say anything; and with a certain relief—for bad as things were, they might still have been worse!—he saw her take her seat beside Eileen, and join in the general conversation, with her usual tranquil air. If she looked a shade paler and colder than usual, no one but he observed it. A little earlier than was their wont, the Fitzallans took their leave, at Asenath's suggestion, as she had still, she said, some preparations to make for the morrow's journey.

Ray was thankful when they got up to go. The strain of keeping up appearances, of endeavouring to look and speak as usual, was almost too much for him.

The family all took a most cordial and affectionate farewell of Asenath. While Mrs. Percival and the girls surrounded her, wishing her a pleasant voyage and a speedy return, Ray found that it was impossible to get a word with her apart, especially as she never cast so much as a glance in his direction, and managed, with feminine adroitness, to completely ignore him without her avoidance appearing intentional. The parting salutations and good wishes began in the hall, continued out into the front garden, and accompanied the departing guests to the very gate.

They were all grouped about the gate; the gate was open; and still Asenath had never looked at nor spoken a word to Ray, who stood by, with thunderclouds on his brow and fiery rage and anguish fighting in his heart, his eyes fixed on her as if their sombre burning gaze must force and compel hers to turn and meet his own. How pale and fair and cold her face looked in the moonlight! She had the lace scarf—that mischief-making scarf that was the cause of all the trouble!—round her shoulders. Was this the last, the very *last* that he should ever see of her?

Mrs. Percival and the girls had kissed her all round—her husband held the gate open for her.

"You haven't said good-bye to Ray!" exclaimed Rhoda, always the *enfant terrible* of the family.

"Haven't I?" she said with well-feigned unconscious surprise. "Good night, Mr. Percival." She spoke quite lightly and coolly. He caught her hand eagerly; but like an icicle it just touched and slipped out of his, giving him no chance to press those chilly slender fingers on which his own were quivering to close in a grasp that should tell her *something*, at least, of what his lips might not say. But he felt that the slim cold hand absolutely shrank as it slid away from contact with his; and though her eyes were at the last for one moment lifted to his face, they met his eager beseeching gaze with an icy glitter of abiding wrath and merciless disdain. So she turned away and left him; and the clang of the gate closing behind her fell like an iron bar upon his heart, as he knew himself unforgiven!

CHAPTER XI.

"MY SIN WAS THAT I LOVED SO MUCH."

"Yesterday this day's madness did prepare—
To-morrow's silence—triumph—or despair."

THAT night Ray Percival spent in wide-eyed wakefulness. He had "murdered sleep" for himself as effectually as the guilty and red-handed Thane, and the dark hours seemed as if they would never end. The episode of that evening had suddenly bared to his eyes an undiscovered baser self—a self whose existence he had never suspected until then. He had come upon it unexpectedly; he saw it unveiled in all its ugliness, and it struck him with horror and dismay.

The more he thought of what he had done, the more he felt crushed to the earth by remorseful shame. There is no burden more utterly crushing than shame, even when undeserved, to a sensitive nature; but on him this night it bore with double weight—for he knew that it was he who had shamed himself. She had called him a coward—yes, a "pitiful coward!"—the blood rushed to his brow and burnt there like a stain as the words seemed still to hiss in his ear; and he felt that they were *true*. It was a cowardly thing—he would have said of any other man who had acted so, that he ought to be kicked like a cur! If Ray Percival's qualities in general were of the Celtic character, one quality in particular he had that was purely and sturdily Saxon—a sense of justice, so strong that even the emotionalism of his temperament was dominated and mastered by it. He was conscientiously stern in his self-judgment now, and he dealt himself as hard measure as he would have dealt to another. He had the faults as well as the virtues of his highly-strung and sensitive nervous temperament, but combined with the strong sense of fairness and justice which is not often found in that class of character. His passionate and

impulsive nature—generous and affectionate, if wayward and unruly—might lead him astray and plunge him into error, even into sin; but he would not seek to prove his wrong was right; he would accept the full responsibility of his deeds, and stand up unflinchingly to pay the penalty.

Now he felt that he could even have cut off his right hand to undo that minute's madness. She was right in her scorn—her angry disdain; but how bitterly it hurt him! it rankled in his heart like a poisoned sting!

Could it be possible that that look of abiding anger and pitiless scorn was the last he should see for ever of Asenath Fitzallan—that in her memory, if ever she should remember him, if she did not wipe him out of her mind like a defacing blot, he stood dishonourable and disgraced!

No, that thought was not to be endured; he must not dwell on that! That way madness lay! Then when and how should he meet her again? Perhaps not for a long, long time; and then that impression of him—as the man, the “coward” she had called him, who had seized and kissed her by force, against her will—would be so fixed and crystallized in her mind, would any effort of his be able to eradicate it?

Would she shut the secret of her resentment and its just cause in her own breast, he wondered, or would she tell her husband?

For his own part, he thought recklessly, he did not care a jot if she did—except that the bitterness of his regret would be redoubled if his misconduct should come to his mother's ears. She was so proud of him! She believed in him so devotedly! Had all the world accused him, he knew that except from his own lips *she* would never believe a word against him.

When he thought of her loving pride in him, he could not bear to cut so sorry a figure in her pure and honest eyes! and yet if a word of that evening's unlucky incident should ever reach her, he would rather she should know the simple truth from himself than that she should torture him with her loyal confidence that her son could never forget that he was a man and a gentleman.

He fancied he could hear her exclaim, with such absolutely incredulous repudiation of the idea as to be almost more scornful than indignant:

“What? My Ray insult a lady under my roof?” And he felt it would be bitter as death to have to tell her that tender faith was misplaced.

Then he went back to the thought of Asenath, far away, hating him, despising him, misjudging, yes, truly misjudging him; for she would think only of the offence, without knowing the regret, the remorse that only waited to be poured out at her feet. She would judge his whole nature by his one hour of weakness. No, that was *not* to be! He would not sit down quietly under her contempt, her mistaken judgment of him from his one fault; it

would drive him mad! and by the morning he had made up his mind.

Mrs. Percival noticed when he came down late to breakfast that he looked ill, and could eat nothing, and to escape from her anxious inquiries he rushed hastily into the first pretext which occurred to him—that of a toothache—a pretext which he afterwards considered a fortunate one, because had he hit on almost any other ailment she would certainly have begged him urgently to stay at home all day, whereas, under the plea of a raging tooth, when he presently went out, she naturally assumed, without his saying a word, that he was going to the dentist's to be set in order before starting for the Tyrol on the morrow.

But no dentist could pluck out the fang that tormented him, nor could any dentist's appointment inspire half such unpleasant anticipations as those with which Ray looked forward to the interview he had determined to seek with Mrs. Fitzallan. In laying his plan he had carefully recalled what he had heard of hers. This was Wednesday, and her steamer sailed from Liverpool on the Thursday morning; but Dr. Fitzallan was going with her to Liverpool on the Wednesday to visit some American friends of hers who were staying there, and he would see her on board the next morning before he returned to London.

Ray's hope was to be fortunate enough to secure a few minutes' *tête-à-tête* with her before they left London. Were it ever so brief, could he see her alone, he would tell her how deeply he regretted his offence, entreat her to blot it out of her mind, ask her pardon, get but one word of forgiveness from her before she left him. He hardly knew what excuse he should frame for a farewell call to-day, when they had all bidden her good-bye last night; but it seemed his last straw of hope, and he caught at and clung to it. His heart beat with a mingling of eagerness and apprehension as he knocked at the Fitzallans' door and rang a peal at the bell.

"Is Mrs. Fitzallan at home?" he asked, aiming, but not with brilliant success, at his usual cheery tone.

"No, sir. The doctor and Mrs. Fitzallan, they've both gone to Liverpool. Mrs. Fitzallan's going to Canada."

"Yes, I knew," said Ray with a cold chill of horrible disappointment; "but I did not know they were going so early."

"Yes, sir; they went by the early train," said the smiling maid.

Ray turned away almost in despair—almost, but not quite, for his spirit rose up rebellious against the disappointment; and he refused to accept the fiat that all opportunity of pleading for her pardon, of atoning for and blotting out his offence, was shut from him.

One path was barred, but he would find or force another. ¹

His first thought was to follow her to Liverpool; but then he remembered that he would not know where to find her when he got there, that she was with husband and friends, and that thus it

would be next to impossible to obtain a moment's private interview with her on this her last evening on land, even supposing he could hit on a pretext for being in Liverpool and seeking her out. Then he thought of writing to Liverpool. He did not know her address for the night, still that was no obstacle; he could send a letter to be delivered to her next morning on board the steamer for Quebec.

But she might refuse to read a letter from him; or, worse still, it might fall into her husband's hands when he accompanied her on board. Fitzallan might by some chance open it and read it; and then if she had not confided her annoyance to him the discovery of it thus might cause *her* some trouble. No, that would not do.

The Quebec steamers stop at Moville on their way out. Could he then send a letter to the care of the steamship agents at Moville? He might do that certainly, but the proceeding was open to the same objection—that she might refuse to read a letter in his handwriting; and, besides, how could he even express himself in pen and ink? What written words could ever convey all that he felt and longed to say to her?

Then another idea shot into his mind—a wild and daring one. He went to the steamer office, and inquired when the “*Sicilian*,” which sailed the next morning, was expected to touch at Moville. On the Friday morning, was the answer.

How long did she stay at Moville?

They couldn't say; she took mails and passengers on board there.

Long enough for any one to go on board to see a friend and come ashore again?

They couldn't say. She lay out in Lough Foyle, and the tender took out the mails and passengers to her, and then she sailed. They thought she didn't generally wait longer than just to get the mails and passengers on board.

This was the sum of the information he obtained by a series of questions. He turned back as he was about to leave, and asked, as if by an afterthought, whether the “*Sicilian*” had her full complement of passengers this voyage, or were there any vacant berths? The clerk referred to a huge ledger, and informed him that the cabins were not quite filled up; there were two or three places still to let.

Then Ray left the office and walked the streets, neither knowing nor caring in the least where he went. Up one street and down another he went his way as if pursued.

“His own thought drove him like a goad.”

He could see what to do now. The plan unrolled itself clearer and clearer before him. All his preparations were made to start

on the morrow for Switzerland and the Tyrol. On that morrow, while the "Sicilian" was on her way up the Irish Channel towards Moville, he could, if he chose, instead of starting for Dover, *en route* for the Continent, set his face the other way, and take the Irish mail to Dublin, train across country, and meet the "Sicilian" at Moville. It was all perfectly smooth and easy. He had everything in readiness for a journey, even to a good roll of bank and circular notes—a rather larger sum indeed than he was likely to require for a continental tour; but Ray, unluckily for himself, lived in a chronic state of outrunning his means, and had never got into any very serious trouble yet. He liked to have plenty of money in his pocket, and as he was always more or less in debt, he did not fret himself by caring whether it was more or whether it was less. So there was nothing to prevent his going to Moville, or further still if he chose; nothing, except indeed that although he had never been tied to his mother's apron strings, and her devoted love had always left him quite as free as was good for him, yet the confidence between them had always been perfect; he had never yet told or implied a falsehood to her; he was by nature as honest and truthful as she believed him to be, which is saying a great deal. And now, if he took this course, he must for the first time deceive her, tacitly at least must leave her under a false impression, and let her believe it was the Dover mail, and not the Irish express, by which he started.

He did not like this idea; but on the other hand it seemed to him in his present mood that in this course lay his only chance of making his peace with Mrs. Fitzallan. He had made up his mind that he could not express himself by letter. It was clear that he could not hope for a word in private with her at Liverpool. What was left then but to follow, meet the "Sicilian" at Moville, and then? well, trust to circumstances, commit himself to the current, and go whithersoever it bore him. His mind was too overstrained and unbalanced with brooding on the one idea for him to be capable of clear judgment or of foresight; he only looked one day ahead; his eyes were blinded to the possible results of the course of action he proposed. The dominant thought that Asenath had left him despising him, in rightful anger and just contempt, wrought in him almost to madness; that last scornful look of hers was branded on his heart; his whole soul was concentrated on the purpose of seeking, entreating, compelling her forgiveness and forgetfulness; the blind impulse to rush recklessly after her was too violent for him to resist; indeed he was at present incapable of seeing any reasons why he ought to resist it.

The next day he took leave of his mother with unusual affection; he told her he could not give any address just yet, as his movements were uncertain; and she was not to look for his writing often because he might be doing a little mountaineering. "And

you know I'm never much of a correspondent," he said; "I hate to be hampered with feeling that I've got to write when I come into a place at night, perhaps dead tired. But don't you be worrying yourself about me, mater," he added, putting his arm round her and giving her an ursine squeeze; "I shall be all right."

The steamer "*Sicilian*" put into Lough Foyle early on Friday morning, and having taken the mails and the Merville passengers on board, proceeded immediately on her voyage. When the Liverpool passengers, who had most of them been sleeping during the brief time that she lay off Merville, came up on deck for their after-breakfast walk or lounge, they faced the open Atlantic and the coast of Ireland lay behind like a heavy purple cloud along the horizon. The day was fine; the rocking motion of the vessel was scarcely perceptible as she rode over the long slow waves that were scarcely more than vast ripples. The predominant line of the ocean was the emerald of deep clear waters under a changeful sky, dashed with fitful gleams, that lightened to azure and darkened to amethyst, as the Protean clouds shifted and chased each other across the blue vault above.

Asenath Fitzallan presently came on deck alone. She paused a moment at the top of the stairs to draw her shawl close round her, as the morning breeze was fresh and keen. A man was standing by the open door of the companionway, watching with suppressed eagerness as his fellow-passengers came up on deck by ones and twos.

Asenath cast a careless casual glance up at him as she brushed past him on the threshold, and paused with a start of almost incredulous surprise as she recognized Ray Percival, whom she had left in London three nights before, and who was then about to start on a continental tour.

"*You ! here ?*" she exclaimed with a flash of astonishment that was ready to turn in a moment to indignation. "How came you here ?"

He was very pale, and his eyes sought hers with a half-defiant, half-appealing look, as he stammered out brokenly :

"I—I'm going over on a little business, suddenly."

"Indeed ?" she said coldly, and drawing up her head with a haughty gesture she turned away from him and passed on. He thought it best not to follow her immediately, but to let her get over her first startled surprise at the sight of him before he sought to speak to her. He watched her along the deck, and noticed where she sat down, and then went his way; but he could not rest long out of sight of her; he was drawn as if by a powerful magnet to that side of the deck, though he compelled himself to walk past her at a little distance and without stopping or taking any apparent notice of her.

The first time he so passed her, he saw she was entering into conversation, though it seemed only an exchange of casual

and languid remarks, with a lady who sat next her. The second time this lady had moved; and her place, he was glad to see, was taken by the jovial captain; for the captain, as Ray knew well, was not likely to be very long off guard, or able to pay more than a few minutes' attention at a time to even his fairest passenger. The third time Ray passed he saw that, as he had anticipated, the captain had moved on, had gone up on to the bridge and left the chair next to Mrs. Fitzallan vacant. Ray threw himself into it; but his reception was distinctly unpromising, for she was looking straight before her, and never turned her eyes towards him. He waited a moment or two, his heart beating so that he felt as if he had a sledge-hammer in his breast, then said abruptly and almost breathlessly, "Won't you speak to me?"

"I have nothing whatever to say to you," she replied frigidly.

"But *I* have something to say to *you*," he urged.

"Which I do not care to hear," she said.

"But you must hear it," he began impetuously.

"I will not," she interrupted him in an incisive tone that cut clear as cold steel. "Will you leave me? or must *I* leave this place?"

Ray sprang up and strode away, frowning blackly and biting his lip until it bled. Her icy and immovable resentment was hard to bear; it stirred up in him that worser part of himself he had only lately discovered. If there is a devil chained up in every man, Ray felt that *his*, roused by her scorn, was tugging hard at his chain. But he wrestled with his baser self, grappled and forced it down. It had taken possession of him once; it should *not* possess him again. She had a right to be angry with him; he must and would compel himself to endure her not unjust wrath. Bitter as it was, he had filled the cup for himself and must drink it to the dregs.

All the rest of that day he kept away from her, but seldom lost sight of her, watched from a distance, even when too far to see her face, the dark blue dress and the white shawl. At lunch and dinner his place was far from hers, and on the whole he was not sorry for it. Table small-talk was not what he desired with her, even if she would have consented to speak to him, which he was tolerably sure she would *not*.

Twilight came, and then moonlight. Somewhat late in the evening, Ray saw, and his heart gave a leap in the seeing, a tall graceful woman's figure leaning over the bulwarks alone. The white shawl, the dark dress, the pale clear profile—yes, it was she. He made up his mind to seize on this opportunity; but he would have felt more comfortable facing the black muzzles of levelled guns or bristling hedge of bayonets than when he stood by her side and she turned and looked in his face.

"See here," he began abruptly, in the deepened, roughened tone of emotion, "don't you think you've punished me enough? Won't you grant me one word?"

"Why do you *ask*?" she replied with a cold and disdainful glance. "You have timed your request excellently well."

"What do you mean?" he rejoined quickly.

"There is no one near," she said with bitter and cutting significance. "And no one is better aware than you, that the safe time to insult a woman is when she is alone."

Ray set his teeth hard, and his hand, resting on the bulwarks, quivered like a tense chord, as he struggled to hold himself in control.

"You do not think as badly of me as you pretend to," he said in a hoarse suffocated voice, "or you would not *dare* to goad me with these taunts."

"Perhaps it is rash of me," she said frigidly, "to risk offending one whose chivalry and manliness have been so well proved."

"I tell you," he replied, passionately reiterating his protest, "if I were as bad as you try to make me out, you would *not* dare to drive me to madness in this way!"

This was perfectly true; and something more was true, which he did not suspect—that Asenath, with her cold air of bitter and implacable contempt, was not only perfectly fearless of him, but felt a curious and unaccountable thrill of pleasure in taunting, goading, daring him. He did not give her time for another goad now, but hurried on impetuously:

"I know I behaved like a brute on Tuesday night. I am ashamed to think what a ruffian I must seem in your eyes. That is all—*all* I want to say to you—to tell you I am—no, not sorry—*sorry* is too weak a word. I am utterly ashamed of myself! I can't say more. It was a moment's madness. I'd rather have cut my throat than have offended you past forgiveness! Won't you—won't you forgive me for one mad moment's forgetting myself? Can I do nothing to atone for it?"

"Yes, one thing you can do!" she flashed upon him. "Tell me the truth. What is this sudden business that takes you on the same ship with me? Is it real? is it true? Can you be honest enough to tell me?"

"I *will* tell you the truth," he said boldly. "My business was with *you*. I came here instead of going to Switzerland because I couldn't bear my life with those last stinging words of yours that night always hissing in my ears! Do you remember that you called me a coward? and I can't say it wasn't true of that one insane moment! I followed you to speak to you, to ask your pardon, to *make* you forgive me, and forget that night. You have taunted me with falsehood—well, this is the plain truth! And I have never spoken falsely, never, until now that I stumbled into a subterfuge to cover my own madness."

"And to whom else, pray, have you presented this ingenious subterfuge?"

"To no one."

"You mean that no one knows you are here?"

"No one in the world knows it. I came on my own responsibility, following an impulse I could not resist. You had left me in anger—in scorn. I deserved it, but I felt I must—*must* see you, speak to you."

"Never thinking nor caring how you might compromise *me*!"

"I—I did not think of that," he replied brokenly, abashed and dismayed as he suddenly realized the position from *her* view.

"No, nor of any one but yourself; of anything but your own selfish fancy," she retorted. "Of course you did not think how I should appreciate your honourable consideration in following me in secret when I am alone, away from my husband. Of course," she added, with the concentrated bitterness of deep resentment, "you did not calculate on forcing me into the position of sharing a secret with you!"

The suggestion struck him like a shot to the heart.

"Good God!" he exclaimed agitatedly. "You can't think that I dreamt of entangling you in any way? that such an idea ever entered my mind as—as to calculate on—on compromising you in the slightest degree? You *can't*—you dare *not* think that of me!"

"Have I so much reason for thinking well of you?" she rejoined haughtily.

But Ray made no response. He stood quite silent; she had stabbed him this time too deeply for him to find words. He had abased, humiliated himself before her—all for this! Not to win from her one poor word or sign of forgiveness, but instead, to be accused of deliberately calculating and scheming to compromise her! And the worst of it was that her words had turned a new light on the subject, in which he saw now for the first time how his rash pursuit of her *might*, if it were known, give rise to injurious reflections upon *her*.

Something burnt in his eyes; a dusky dimness crept over the moonlit sea. He pressed his hands across his eyes and brow, and silent as he stood there he realized with cruel clearness, with bitterness unspeakable, that through his reckless following of unbridled impulse he had a second time done what he could not undo. Notwithstanding his madness, he had just as much thought of pulling a star from heaven as of tarnishing the unsullied snow of Asenath's fair fame. And yet he had run the risk of compromising her name against her will; he had laid her innocence open to slanderous aspersions if this story should ever become known, for many would refuse to believe that this pursuit of her across the ocean could have been without her consent. He had been blind—passion blinded, but he saw it now.

A few moments passed as he stood lost in these bitter reflections; then he heard a soft, faint rustling sound, and looking up he saw her figure gliding away silently, leaving him there alone.

That night as he shut himself into his cabin he heard a voice chanting in a monotonous and mournful recitative; the sound jarred painfully on his excited nerves; he endeavoured not to listen, but the more he tried to distract himself from the hearing the more plainly he heard. The unknown man a few cabins off was intoning something that sounded like snatches of the burial service. Ray remembered having heard that day—though he had not thought of it till now, as he had thought of nothing but of *her*—that one of the saloon passengers was out of his mind—“gone mad on religion” had been the expression—and was returning to his home in Canada in charge of an attendant. This, no doubt, then, was the voice of the unfortunate man. Ray could now distinguish the words of his dreary chant:

“Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery.”

It seemed an appropriate chant enough to Ray just now; he was so full of misery that he felt as if he did not care how short a time he had to live; and he little dreamt of the dark days ahead, nor that his troubles were only now in their beginning!

Presently another louder voice broke in with an authoritative but not unkindly tone:

“Come, it’s time to go to bed, and the other passengers mustn’t be disturbed at this hour; they want to sleep.”

And then the mournful recitative ceased into silence. Meanwhile Asenath in her cabin was as wakeful as Ray in his. The crust of thin ice over her nature was shattered as effectually as a pane of fragile glass shivered by a stone—it was broken up by passionate wrath. The utterances of her anger had been cold and piercing like ice and steel, but the wrath itself was like flame. Never in her calm life had her whole nature been so quickened and stirred before. Her resentment of the offence was every now and then thrilled through and through with pulsations of a fierce and feline delight in the punishment of the offender. The reactions of anger and exultation pierced to the very depths of her heart. She knew that her scorn had bitten him to the bone, and she was glad. She had tortured him by her bitter taunts, and she exulted; her steady heart beat faster and faster and deeper and deeper as she went through the interview in spirit again.

There was a flush on her cheeks, a glowing light in her eyes. The kindled fire of emotion gave all that was lacking to her statuesque beauty. Warmth, glow and colour lit up her fair pale features to new loveliness. She caught a glimpse of herself in the glass, and, half-surprised, paused a moment to look. Was anger so becoming? Of course it was nothing but anger—just, righteous, fitting anger. If through it there shot now and then an unspoken, unworded consciousness that this man loved her—what of that? Nothing, except that she could make that love of his a weapon to

strike him with, to inflict upon him his just and proper punishment—no more! True, he had never *said* he loved her, but it needed no words. This evening's interview had left her no room for doubt in her secret heart, although she would not admit it even to herself in plain language.

To be loved was no common thing of every day to Asenath; she had not had much love in her life. Power over man was really new to her; with all her personal attractions, she was not magnetic to the many, her charm only drew the few. Since the days of Gervas Fitzallan's ardent courtship, she had not known such power as now to-night she felt she had over Ray Percival. She was bitterly wroth with him, as she had good right to be. Although not of a timid nature, she was alarmed and anxious when she thought of her husband's anger when he—if he—should know of all this business. She felt her position cruelly embarrassing, and she naturally resented her anxiety and embarrassment upon Ray, the wilful cause, whose sole fault it was. Her anxiety was, however, less than her anger! and her anger, fierce though it was, yet scarcely stirred her so deeply as the sense of passionate exultation with which she felt that she held in her own hands the power to chastise.

She too heard in the distance the mad passenger's mournful monotone of fragmentary passages of the solemnest of the services of the church; but the melancholy sound did not trouble her much; she was living too intensely to herself at that hour to be vividly impressed by any outside influences. She wondered at the last, just before she went to sleep, had she not perhaps been just a *little* hard on him when she turned away without one parting word, and left him alone in his remorseful shame and humiliation of spirit?

(To be continued.)

THE HOUSE OF WITTELSBACH.

By BARBARA HUTTON.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

LEAVING behind me an old farmhouse built on a very high hill in the Wye country, and walking down beautiful meadows between wooded hills, I muse on the difference between my present life (the calm, uneventful one of a country home) and some brilliant scenes assisted at but a few months before at Munich.

Sitting on a stile, listening idly to a purling brook and the sweet singing of many feathered songsters, the distant church chimes remind me to hurry on to the town. The bells that I hear are (so I have been told) the same that Henry the Fifth brought over from Calais after Agincourt, and presented to his birth-place.

Only that afternoon some one had said to me, while we were speaking of my residence in Munich, "Are not *all* the Bavarian royal family insane?"

I thought I would, to prove the contrary, just write simply down all that I knew from my personal experience and knowledge of the genial, kind-hearted members of the House of Wittelsbach.

Just as, leaving the fields, I turned into a dusty lane I met two ladies. The taller of the twain carried a walking-stick, and both were most plainly dressed in black. The slouching hat worn by the taller lady could not conceal the regular features and arched eyebrows of one whom I had seen in far different places, first as the Empress of the French, idolised by her court, covered with jewels, the loveliest woman at a Tuileries ball.

Strange contrasts in life, to meet her as she was taking a country walk, inquiring her way to Symonds Yat. The face was older, and the scene different; but I thought her still beautiful, graceful and stately as when amid clamouring crowds my last glimpse of her had been in the Bois de Boulogne, a short time before the third empire fell. Suffering I thought had given her face a charm it may have earlier lacked—*expression*.

To return to the House of Wittelsbach. Very little is known about the members of it in England.

English travellers visit Bavaria in summer, when Munich is deserted by the upper classes, who are then gone to the Bavarian highlands or German baths, leaving their palaces and homes uninhabited. Grateful for much kindness shown two quiet Englishwomen last winter in Bavaria, as well as during a longer residence in its capital thirty years before, I jot down a few recollections, both of the days when old King Lewis, the munificent patron of art, still lived but no longer reigned, and while King Maximilian the First was king, down to the time when the son of the one and brother of the other, the Regent Luitpold, holds the reins of government.

The widow of King Max has quite recently gone to her rest. I was much disappointed while in Munich that though the queen mother had intended to do so, she had never been well enough to receive myself and other English ladies anxious to be presented to her at a private audience.

I remembered her in my earlier visit young and beautiful; but last winter I only saw her on two occasions. Once I met (and stood still as it passed) her splendid carriage in the Ludwig Strasse, and caught a glimpse of a sweet sad face in a black bonnet, and the second time was the day after the news had come, striking consternation throughout all classes, of the suicide or murder of the Austrian Archduke Rudolph.

All know that opposite his bed at Meyerling had hung his cousin's picture, the queen mother's ill-fated son—Lewis the Second of Bavaria.

The news must have revived all her saddest recollections, for as I stood a few days later in the Allerheiligen chapel, the queen's sobs were quite audible to all in the church. She seemed unable to control them, as the pathetic sounds of a requiem rose and fell upon the ear. At last her brother-in-law, the kind-hearted regent, left his own pew, and was seen to be endeavouring to comfort her as he led her from the royal gallery.

The next thing we heard last winter of Queen Marie was that she was very ill, and that Italian air having done nothing for her, she was returning home to Bavaria. In May she died of dropsy.

Munich was a very different place thirty years ago, to what it now is. In those days the Maximilian Strasse was not built. The Ludwig Strasse was then the principal street, and the Sieges Thor ended the thoroughfare. In 1889 several streets and many fine and large houses are in existence outside the Thor. In one of the larger houses lives popular Prince Leopold, the regent's second son. He married his cousin, the Princess Gisela, sister to the ill-fated Archduke Rudolph. When I arrived in Munich one December morning last year, I was extremely struck with the changed appearance of the place. Its whole character seemed altered to me from my earlier recollection.

For one thing, the costume of the lower orders had vanished.

Both King Lewis the First and King Max encouraged and liked to see the lower classes wearing the gold and silver head-dresses, fur hats, bead necklaces, short, coloured, many-folded petticoats that composed, thirty years ago, the national dress of Bavarian peasants. It was no uncommon sight in those days, but now the costume is never to be seen in the streets of Munich, and all is changed in that respect.

Except for the snow (scarcely ever absent in the streets) Munich thoroughfares are no longer characterised by any individual features of their own.

The inhabitants hurry on, very much as they do in other cities, and though one sees more uniforms worn in Munich than in London or Paris, the ladies are dressed in the same fashions, and look exactly like the fair ones of other places, except that they are not all so good-looking as English women nor so graceful as French.

The men, on the other hand, belonging to the upper classes, are handsomer than the English, and military training gives all a certain smartness in their bearing as they pass by with the inevitable cigar in their mouth, removing their hats (if civilians) completely from their heads to salute and recognize their acquaintance. The churches, splendid galleries and palaces have been too often described to be mentioned here.

The magnificent National Gallery, and the street in which it is located, the Maximilian Strasse, had been built since my first visit; but I missed something that I had known of old in Munich, and that was a thing that had particularly characterised life in Munich during the reigns of Lewis the First and King Max thirty years ago.

What I missed in the ways and customs of 1888 in the Bavarian capital was the vanished *simplicity* of the habits of the upper and middle classes. An old friend—a general high in command—came to see me soon after I arrived. I made the remark to him. “It is quite true, madam,” he replied. “*La simplicité n'existe plus*. Do you recollect, madam, how we used to dance in those days during the Carnival, *chez* the Comtesse de Drechsel, or Countess de Gumphenberg” (naming the two daughters by hismorganatic marriage of Prince Charles, the brother of Lewis the First and uncle of present regent). “What did they give us? Why, nothing but bon-bons and cakes or *marrons glacés* for the ladies, and beer in the corridor for the gentlemen. Now,” he continued, “it must be a grand supper, and all is changed. Ah, those were simpler days.”

When the Carnival of 1889 came round I found my old friend was right, and all simplicity of manners, dress and customs had vanished with railway communication.

Still the Bavarians are essentially a lovable people. They have a great deal of kindness about them, and if you ever meet with

rudeness in Munich, and inquire, you will probably find that the offender is not a Bavarian by birth.

The queen mother, who died in May last, was a Prussian princess, and though she rejoiced in the long names of Frederika Francisca Augusta Marie Hedwig, was always called Queen Marie. When she married in 1842 (first by proxy, on the fifth of October, and afterwards in Munich) an accomplished, amiable and popular prince, the then Crown Prince of Bavaria, she must have been as sweet-looking as when I saw her many years later, after her husband became king, his father having abdicated in 1848.

She was small, but very pretty. She dressed very well, and liked her toilette to be admired. She did not speak much English, but what she said was so kind, and the soft eyes lifted to the face of the person she spoke to so gracious, that there was an indescribable charm in her gentle manner, though she was not clever or so cultivated as many others of the family. She was a Lutheran at her marriage, but had long before her death joined the Roman communion and became a zealous Catholic. Poor queen! She had need indeed of the consolations of religion, both sons, both being kings, having been afflicted with the terrible disease of insanity. King Lewis the Second was quite a young boy when I first lived in Munich. He was then a dreamy, beautiful child. King Lewis the First was living when I first recollect Munich. He resided in that square palace, called after the name of the reigning family, in the Brienner Strasse. He never at that time appeared on public occasions, but occasionally received in private audience foreigners visiting Munich eligible to go to court. He always patronized concerts given at the Odéon, and between the first and second parts of the performance would perambulate the room, recognizing the people whom he knew, and often making very amusing remarks about their dress or appearance in an audible voice.

He was not handsome, but the face even then, as an old man, was determined and firm, the forehead intellectual, the eyes clear and piercing.

King Lewis was most popular, and his eccentricities and the one weakness of his life, his infatuation for Lola Montes, being forgotten at the time I speak of, it was pleasant to see how respectfully he was saluted when he passed along the Munich thoroughfares, generally on foot, and often unattended.

During my first visit I was presented to King Otho of Greece, who, having just abdicated his throne, was on a visit to Munich. The royal family at that time comprised the two kings (past and present), King Otho of Greece, the present regent, then Prince Luitpold, with no chance at that time, so it seemed, of being king or regent, his beautiful wife, to whom he was devotedly attached, and his younger brother, Prince Adalbert, who died some years ago.

King Otho always wore the national dress of Greece. It was very picturesque and becoming to him. He was not handsome, but sallow, with dark melancholy eyes, which, however, looked always kind, for, like all members of the Bavarian royal family, he was remarkably amiable.

The late Queen Marie took particular pains to amuse and divert the poor monarch's low spirits. He was supposed to bear a good deal of malice towards English people, in consequence of Lord Palmerston's action at Athens. Being told of this report, and wishing to be courteous to some English young ladies, he made a point at a court ball of leading the youngest of them, a shy girl of seventeen, round the room in the Polish mazurka, a dance that both he and King Max were very partial to. He often invited one of the party to dance, for at that time Munich was very gay, and I well recollect (his English as well as his French being very limited) that his one and only usual remark was, "Le bal est très animé." On the occasion to which I refer a very charming, stately and delightful old lady was present. Indeed, she never omitted to put in an appearance on all public occasions. Although at that time past seventy, her figure was as slight and upright as it must have been at seventeen.

This was King Lewis the First's sister, who married Eugène Beauharnais, Napoleon's stepson, afterwards Duke of Leuchtenberg. His tomb is in one of the churches, executed by Thorwaldsen, and strikingly does the face remind one of our own Albert the Good.

On one occasion the old duchess wore some exquisite emerald and diamond ornaments which had once encircled the neck of the Empress Josephine. The duchess had, I have been told, much revolted against her marriage, which was for political reasons ordered by Napoleon, but it ended by becoming a happy union, and when Eugène Beauharnais died his widow sincerely mourned his death.

She was sister to King Lewis the First. King Maximilian the Second, born in 1811, became king at his father, Lewis's, abdication in 1848.

At the time of my first visit to Munich King Max was nearly fifty, and remarkably thin, but I have heard people say that he had been a fine man in his youth. The statue erected to his memory in the Maximilian Strasse is an admirable likeness. He had a fine brow, oval face and pale complexion, and had just escaped being a handsome man. He was too stolid to be attractive, but no one could deny that in his bearing he was, as the saying is, "every inch a prince," but he was fearfully stiff. King Max was the least German-looking of his family; though his eyes were blue, he had not the good-tempered look of his brothers, but often looked (as he was) depressed. Nevertheless, he was, like his father, King Lewis, a thoroughly *capable* man.

Although he suffered throughout his life from neuralgic pains

in the head, and took incessant bodily exercise to relieve it, there were no signs of insanity about him. He resembled his mother, Queen Thérèse (who had forgiven and forgotten at the time I speak of her husband's infatuation for the terrible Lola), more than King Lewis. Like most of the family, he was very short-sighted, and rather shy. That is an unpleasant quality in princes, but King Max tried in society to overcome his natural reserve, and enjoyed gaiety in others, if unable to cultivate it himself. He was always beautifully dressed and careful about his appearance, in which respect the present regent does not resemble him.

Max the Second was not so clever a man as King Lewis the First or his grandfather, Max Joseph, the first founder of the glories of Munich, but he had a great deal of imagination, which enabled him to appreciate beauty in art and nature and the refining properties of elegance. Then again the king was a pious and sincere Catholic, but no bigot. Having been educated at Gottingen, his views were broad and liberal both about men and in matters of philosophy. Although the learned Doctor Döllinger fell under the ban of the Pope, King Max appreciated and valued that famous man. That eminent and learned man still (in 1889) lives. Early in this present year he attained the great age of ninety years, and continues (in his house in the Schönfeld Strasse) to lead a very studious life. I am told he is particularly courteous to his numerous English and American visitors. I had not courage enough to intrude a visit upon him, though, speaking our language thoroughly, I was told he would have received me kindly.

King Max being a great pedestrian, his favourite walk was round the Englische Garten, in Munich. He was often to be met quite alone, but at other times might be seen accompanied by an accomplished Frenchman, the Viscount de Vanblanc, long since dead. I knew the latter intimately, and he often told me that when out with the king their conversation turned upon all that they had seen when travelling together in England, Germany, or the East. De Vanblanc (who was an author, having written a valuable work on the Crusades) had attached himself in early life to the Bavarian court, and remained with the king till the latter died.

Hohenschwangau's present splendour is attributed entirely to the late king, who lavished immense sums of money on its decoration, but it was his father who began the restoration of that world-famed castle.

He first recognized the beautiful situation of the castle, whose towers seem built to guard the passes that lead into the Bavarian highlands, like giants of old legends. Max improved and planted the park at Hohenschwangau, for he had a keen eye for natural beauty, and was passionately fond of scenery. Lewis the First is justly celebrated as a patron of art; but King Max's great ambition was to aim at encouraging men of science and literature around his throne. He was (as Lewis had been before him) the liberal

patron of the painters Kaulbach, the elder Piloty, and others, while Liebig, Geibel, Heyse and Carrière were encouraged to settle in Munich. He first thought of building a National Gallery in Munich after a visit to Paris. He carried out his idea by erecting in the street that bears his name a magnificent national museum.

In politics he was liberally inclined, and had the good sense to see he must go with the age. Influenced throughout his life by a strong sense of duty, he preserved an unswerving loyalty to his oath (taken on succeeding his father in 1848) to be true to the Bavarian constitution. This honourable fidelity was not forgotten by the deputies from the Chambers who assembled to condole with his son in 1865, when the latter succeeded his father, Max the Second.

Had he had a wider sphere and a dominion with more resources for development than a third-rate kingdom offered, probably, with his intellectual powers of mind, King Max might have even achieved greatness.

He did a great deal for Bavaria and a great deal for Munich, yet when his subjects speak of him it is with no enthusiasm. The Bavarians love show and glitter, and while Max was too reserved to fascinate their imaginations, they dwell with tears in their eyes on the memory of his son, the late king, whose mad freaks of only driving out at midnight, when the snow-clad roads about Berg had to be lighted up by torches, that his gilded coach might get along the mountainous roads, or his extraordinary love of solitude, are still spoken of and dwelt upon with affection, even while they admit that he was insane.

King Max was spared one pang. He was thoroughly Bavarian, and fondly nursed the conviction that Munich—the second Athens—would ever remain the capital of an Independent State. His whole heart and soul would have been revolted at the idea that his country would become Prussia's vassal! Yet such it is.

He had great qualities, never deserting a friend, moral, excellent both as father and husband. There was great dignity in the answer he sent back to Munich while in Italy for his health. A southern climate seemed absolutely necessary for his recovery, yet when his subjects begged him to return, he answered by saying, "I will come, I know my duty as a king." He returned to die shortly afterwards. The king had been back a little less than two months, when one evening in March, 1864, he complained of indisposition. His illness took a serious turn so suddenly, that the inhabitants of Munich were taken by surprise when a few nights later the opera house was suddenly closed. Queen Marie never left his bedside. The royal family were all sent for. The Archbishop of Munich and priests carrying the holy sacrament were seen entering the palace. The palace gates were left open, and an immense number of people assembled outside, and even besieged the doors

of the sick man's chamber; pale faces and trembling lips all betokening that they loved and were anxious about their ruler.

At length the deep tones of the bells of the Theatiner Church, which is nearest to the Residenz, began to toll, and then the people knew that King Max had ceased to live.

His eldest son was at his father's bedside and piously closed his eyes. When the crowd heard he was dead, many sobbed and hundreds knelt down to pray for the repose of his soul and the future of the kingdom. The Bavarian royal family are always men of simple and unaffected intercourse with their subjects. The crowd were allowed access to the chamber of death, and permitted to gaze on the king (whose motto had been "God and my people"), while he still lay on the bed where he had breathed his last sigh.

His son Lewis was proclaimed king the next day.

Munich at the time I first knew it had a far gayer court than it now possesses.

Though King Max was reserved and quiet by nature, Queen Marie loved, in the days of my first residence in Munich, both to entertain and to be entertained. Two large State functions always took place (as they still do) at the Bavarian court.

One was a large State concert at which the ladies were ordered to appear in feathers and trains, full court costume, and the other was a State ball. The ball room at Munich is magnificent when lighted up, and very brilliant it looked when one night, about thirty years ago, I first saw it. The entrance of King Max and Queen Marie, ushered in by a long line of chamberlains, was very striking and brilliant. When I saw the room again last January, it impressed me very much in the same way as it had done at first, so many years before.

In those days, the names of many historic families were to the fore. There was a beautiful countess, covered with diamonds, whose death occurred while I was in Munich last winter. She was so conspicuous an ornament at the court of King Max that I wondered at finding even her name no longer recollected in the court set. Her lovely face encircled by curls I saw still hanging on the walls of the room called "the Beauty Gallery," leading from the ball room. Names such as Esterhazy, then the Austrian minister at the Court of Bavaria, as Prince von Wrede now is, Auersperg, Thurn and Taxis, recur to my memory. It was a very brilliant winter. After the State ball a series of smaller dances were given, called "kammer" balls. They used to take place in a large ball-room at the top of the palace. It not being etiquette that the *corps diplomatique* should appear in the king's presence except in uniform, diplomates were not asked to these dances. They were delightful re-unions, intimate and friendly parties, and the supper under orange trees was always tempting and good.

The regent, then Prince Luitpold, and his brother Adalbert, were very fond of dancing in those good old days. It was quite

something to see the former dance the polka mazurka, then a fashionable dance, with his cousin the beautiful and fascinating Countess de Gumphenberg.

I inquired after her last winter and was told she was seventy, but still pretty. Then there were the Taschers de la Pagerie. They migrated very soon afterwards to Paris, being near relatives of the third Napoleon. How witty one of their number was!

One kammer ball, some one after supper proposed dancing a country dance, or *la tempête*, one and the same thing. Some of the ladies who stood up did not know how to dance it, on which the Duchess of Leuchtenberg got up and came forward to show us all the way, finally leading it off herself. She was essentially a *grande dame*, but was enamelled wonderfully. The Princess Luitpold had a lovely skin, and when the two royal ladies stood side by side the enamel showed its real nature, but the duchess was so graceful and charming, no one could associate old age with her image.

The end of that Carnival, a town in the Vorarlberg was destroyed by fire.

To raise funds for its restoration and the relief of the inhabitants, Duke Max of Bavaria, father of the present Empress Elizabeth of Austria, lent a large room in his palace, and Count Charles Tascher de la Pagerie (who died a few years later in Paris) issued invitations to ladies and gentlemen to assist him in giving three representations of Schiller's "Song of the Bell" by *tableaux vivants*. It was a most brilliant success. The rehearsals went off amicably. The younger Kaulbach designed the dresses. When the first night came it was a beautiful sight. After a little French piece had been admirably acted on a stage erected in one of the largest salons in the palace, the curtain again drew up; a forge was seen in front. Schiller's beautiful poem was recited by Count Fritz de Luxburg. Soft music began to play, when another curtain was withdrawn. Most artistically arranged figures in mediæval costumes represented in several scenes the "Song of the Bell."

The following evening it was acted before the king and Queen Marie, and all the royalties were there. A large sum was realized. The old Duchess of Leuchtenberg was there. She sat in a draught of air and took cold. Her lying in state, which I attended, her funeral procession in the Ludwig Strasse, are among my last recollections of Munich, as I remember that capital thirty years ago. What I saw and heard last winter I will tell you in another number.

(To be concluded.)

PAUL RAVEN'S CONFESSION.

By HUGH COLEMAN DAVIDSON,

AUTHOR OF "THE GREEN HILLS BY THE SEA."

MISFORTUNE had dogged the heels of Paul Raven as long as he could remember. He seemed to have been born to an inheritance of trouble. It had left its marks upon his thin spare frame, his white face with its transparent skin and conspicuous veins, his melancholy eyes, and even upon his black hair, which, though he had not reached the age of thirty, was already touched with grey. Considered one of the best medical students of his year he had only just succeeded in scrambling through his examinations, and starting in life as a London doctor he had failed to get a single patient. His hopes invariably ended in disappointment. In order to explain the mystery some of his friends took to describing him as superficial; others said the clue lay in his constitutional timidity, which prevented his doing the right thing at the right time.

But when Paul Raven married a young and beautiful wife, and, aided by her money, bought a country practice, a new era seemed to have opened for him. A fine old ivy-clad house standing in a large garden was selected as their home. By the sale of fruit and vegetables he hoped to supplement his income. The need of some such addition soon became evident, for the practice proved to be very different from what it had been represented. In fact, the young doctor had been swindled.

To make matters worse, before the house was properly furnished his wife was summoned to the bedside of a sick sister, and while he was accompanying her to the station their servant ran away, carrying with her some jewellery which belonged to her mistress. Left entirely alone he did not know how to act. First he engaged a man to do a woman's work, and when the man got drunk, arranged with a charwoman to come in for a few hours daily.

This happened on a stormy afternoon in January. The wind was blowing hard from the north-east, and the air was thick with powdery snow. The house, isolated at all times, seemed to have been quite shut off from the outer world. It was as if its neighbours had fled, leaving it to bear the brunt of the storm alone.

Raven, anxious about the safety of his new possessions, determined to go round the garden in order to ascertain whether

any damage had been done to the trees. Crossing the lawn he came upon the track of recent footsteps. He followed them through the shrubbery, and just as he was entering the orchard beyond, heard a crash, a shout and a splash, coming apparently from a well which was covered over with rotten planks. Fortunately, owing to the frost, it contained but little water.

Raven hastened to the spot and looked down. Through the falling snow he could see peering up at him a rough red face with a growth of stubbly beard on the chin.

"Hullo, my man!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing there?"

"I've fell in, sir," was the reply, "and hurted myself badly, and I can't get out."

"So I see," said Raven, for the mossy walls of the deep well were too steep and slippery to support hand or foot. "But before I help you out, tell me how you got in?"

"I was crossing the fields and didn't know this were a garden, and I just stepped through a gap yonder. Honour bright, sir, that's the truth. I'm hurted fearful." And a hollow groan came up from the well.

"You came through a gap! Then what are those footprints on the lawn?"

"I don't know, sir; 'swhelp me, I don't." Another groan.

"You are a stranger here, are you?"

"Never been within a hundred mile of the place before. I'd swear that before all the judges in the land. For pity's sake, sir, lend me a hand, for I'm froze to death."

Raven helped him out, took him into the kitchen and told him to dry his clothes before the fire. The man, though rather uneasy at first, soon grew more accustomed to his position. He described himself as a bricklayer in search of work, and with fluent tongue related a string of heartrending experiences which strongly appealed to the sympathies of his hearer. Bread and cheese were set before him; also whisky and water, whereat his eyes glistened. He had ceased to groan, and was so comfortable that his entertainer had eventually to hint he had better go. As he rose his uneasiness returned.

"Ah! I had forgotten you were hurt," said Raven. "I am a doctor. Let me see your wounds."

"It ain't of no consequence, doctor," replied the man, colouring. "The likes of me is used to knocks."

Raven thought this odd after the groans in the well. "But why not let me do what I can?" he urged.

"It ain't of no consequence," repeated the man, making for the door. But before going out he turned to add: "Thank you though for your kindness, doctor. I'll not forget it. Maybe I can do you a good turn yet."

He still hesitated as if he had something more to say, but left it

unsaid. The bang with which he closed the back door echoed through the half-empty house, and aroused Raven to a sense of his loneliness. Something, he knew not what, made him extremely nervous. He shivered at the wind moaning in the chimney; he started at the chirp of a cricket, and glanced round apprehensively. Though the man had gone, he had left behind him a very uncanny atmosphere.

As it was getting dark Raven lighted a lamp and carried it into the sitting-room. After placing it upon the table he drew the blinds and with great care fastened the shutters. There had recently been several robberies in the neighbourhood, and these kept recurring to his mind, already unsettled by the misconduct of his servant. And now that he had time to think more calmly over the appearance of a strange man in the garden, was not that also suspicious? Suppose the two were in league! Raven tried to read but could not fix his attention upon the pages. A revolver lay in a drawer of the writing-table; he took it out and loaded all the chambers.

It was in vain that he strove to allay his irrational fears. He wanted a tonic, he told himself. He rose to fetch it from the surgery, but stopped suddenly, fancying he heard a noise in the hall. Inclination strongly urged him to stay where he was, but the irresistible power which an unknown danger exerts upon the timid, drew him forward. He flung open the door.

A moving object suddenly appeared in the darkness. Upon the impulse of the moment Raven raised his revolver and fired. The report was followed by a groan, and a heavy body fell at his feet. The silence that followed was intense, even the wind being quiet for the moment.

"You've done for me, doctor," said a hoarse voice faintly.

It was the voice of the man who had fallen into the well. Raven ran back into the room, fetched the lamp, and placing it on the tessellated pavement, knelt by the side of the dying man.

"Where are you hit?" he panted.

"They're coming at eleven," said the man, so feebly now as to be almost inaudible.

Raven bent his ear lower.

"Who?" he ejaculated.

"To rob——"

The sentence was never finished. But enough had been said to render it more than probable that the speaker had belonged to a gang of thieves, and that he had come to inform against his confederates in order to save the property, if not the life, of the man who had been so kind to him.

When this broke upon Raven he was nearly frantic. With trembling hands he tore open the shabby fustian waistcoat and flannel shirt, but when he beheld that little round hole through

which the blood was pouring rapidly, he knew that his professional skill would avail him nothing. The man's pulse, when first tested, was scarcely perceptible. A minute or two later it had ceased to beat at all.

So Paul Raven had killed his benefactor.

Fearful thoughts swarmed in upon his dizzy brain. What was he but a murderer? The brand of Cain was upon his forehead, and who could see his heart? The carved head of the staircase scarcely visible in the gloomy hall became the hangman; the door leading into the garden grew into the gallows; in the space of a few moments he suffered all the torments of the condemned. Then a mad resolve arose within him. Neither for his own sake nor for the sake of the wife who loved him could he face that shameful death. No one knew of what he had done. He must remove all traces of his act.

Raven, awakening from a horrible nightmare to an equally horrible reality, found himself dragging the body into his bedroom, a large square room on the ground floor at the back. His face was white and haggard; as he tugged at his heavy burden the perspiration started out on his clammy forehead, and his black hair hung down in ragged disorder. With wildly staring eyes he looked exactly like a madman. And it was instinct rather than reason that guided his movements—the instinct of self-preservation. This led him to conceal the body under the bed until he could dig a grave for it, the place selected naturally occurring to him as the safest in the house, for here was kept his only property of any value, a small box of family plate. By the side of the plate the dead man was laid.

But oh! the blood that flowed from the wound. It left great pools upon the pavement in the hall; it stained the carpet in hideous patches; it trickled out from beneath the valance that hid the body; it ran as if it would never stop, and all efforts to check it only made matters worse. Though a doctor by profession, Raven was sickened by the ghastly sight. He staggered into the kitchen and fetched a pail, but when he went to the pump, that also seemed to run blood. He dipped a cloth in the water and it came out red. Everything, in his terror-filled eyes, had taken the same haunting colour.

Once more in the hall, with the lamp on one side and the pail on the other, he went down on his knees and began to scrub, bringing to his task such fierce concentration of purpose that his previous fears were forgotten. Here he succeeded fairly well, but in the bedroom he smeared instead of obliterating. Do what he would, those dreadful stains remained. When at length, kneeling on the wet carpet, he had done all in his power, his eyes travelled swiftly over the smudgy pattern, and the horror in them gained in intensity, for he realized that he had failed. The open door revived his fears. He could not stay in the room with the dead

man; he must rest awhile before entering upon the last stage of his task.

Paul Raven returned to the sitting-room and shut himself in. There was no sequence in his thoughts; dark and fragmentary, they were swept rapidly across his field of mental vision, and he shuddered as they passed by. He was far too dazed to notice the passage of time.

Hark! was that the wind? He started in his chair and listened, but could hear only the ticking of the clock on the mantelshelf. There it was again! Had some one heard the shot and set the bloodhounds on his track already? Again! Bah! it was only a gust, rattling at the door.

The clock struck the hour—eleven. Then with a sudden shock Paul Raven remembered the words of the dead man: "They are coming at eleven."

They were punctual, too. The door opened and four ruffians burst into the room. Raven sprung towards his revolver which lay upon the table, but stopped half way. He could not kill another man. The intruders, puzzled at his attitude, stood hesitating near the door, each with a revolver ready for use.

"What do you want?" asked Raven.

"Your money," replied the foremost of the party, a tall, dark man in a faded check suit, "and, by thunder, we mean to have it, too." He commenced operations by securing Raven's revolver.

"Take my life. I don't want it. I have no money."

"Ain't you, though! Where's that fine silver you've got?" He looked round the room, which contained neither cupboard nor closed receptacle of any sort except the writing-table. "It don't seem here. But in this house it is, and we'll have it before we go. There's a bedroom at the back; is it there?"

"No," gasped Raven, almost terrified out of his senses.

"You're right, mate," cried another of the gang. "Look at the coward, how he shakes! Come with us, you sir, as a kind gentleman should. Just show us the way."

The desperate energy with which Raven insisted that no silver was in the bedroom, convinced them that their guess had very nearly hit the mark. They bound his hands firmly with a cord which they had brought, and he was compelled to walk between two of their number, the tall man carrying the lamp in front, while the fourth followed behind with a dark lantern. In the bedroom they set their prisoner in a chair, and with levelled revolvers stood before him.

"Now, then," said the tall man, "let's have no more nonsense. Where is this silver?"

"Shoot me if you like," replied Raven. "I will tell you nothing."

"We'll see," said the tall man. "Keep your eyes on him, lads. The more he shakes, the nearer I'm getting to the swag."

He began to slouch about the room, and as he approached the bed, Raven could not help shuddering. The three watchers raised a shout of triumph.

"Go ahead, mate," they cried. "It's under the bed."

In their excitement they no longer paid any heed to their prisoner. He sat perfectly motionless, feeling that detection had overtaken him. In that supreme moment of suspense he was little more than a machine, every bodily function being concentrated upon the act of watching.

The tall man, lifting the valance, thrust his hand under the bed, and then with an oath drew it back as if he had been stung.

"It's a corpse," he shouted excitedly, passing his hand over his white face, which thus became smeared with blood.

His companions, stupefied one moment, were seized with a panic the next. They disappeared from the room as if they were running for their lives, and the tall man rushed wildly after them. Paul Raven, sitting there bound and helpless, could hardly realize that he was left alone—alone with the man he had murdered.

Would they come back? Had they gone to inform against him? How should he escape? Seeing the hangman in every shadow, he struggled with the frenzy of despair; he tore the flesh from off his wrists; but the cord held him firmly. Forced to accept the impossibility of getting free without assistance, he sat there trembling—a poor limp thing with scarcely more vitality than the dead man under the bed. His eyes kept incessantly wandering towards the valance; he had a strange dread of seeing it rise to show a ghastly face staring at him.

The long hours dragged by, weighted with terrors both known and unknown; the wind howled around the house and rattled at the windows, but inside the bedroom reigned the silence of death. The lamp flickered and went out, and the darkness that followed fitted like a solid mask upon Raven's face, so that he could not move in it—indeed, could scarcely breathe.

It was not until the cold grey light came stealing through the blinds that Paul Raven regained his senses. Then, in the absence of any fresh danger, he gradually shook off his stupor and began to prepare for the morning.

The charwoman, when she arrived at seven o'clock, would release him, and a conflict with burglars would explain the stains on the carpet, all details being avoided lest he should be betrayed into inconsistency. Nothing, he would tell her, must be touched until he had communicated with the police; then he would get her out of the room and lock the door. When the evening came he would finish his task; it could not be done during the day. As to the future he would devote himself to humanity. If only he could save a single life, he should in some measure atone for the one he had taken. Surely, even viewed from the standpoint of

the public good, that was far better than that he should suffer a shameful death, which could not fail to kill another innocent person, his wife.

Such was the programme that Paul Raven mapped out for himself. But he was painfully conscious that it might be interrupted at any moment by the return of the burglars to denounce him as a murderer, and while waiting for the time when he could remove the chief evidence against him, he endured inexpressible torture.

With the charwoman he was very successful, though he certainly overacted his part. He was extremely anxious to impress upon her the need of secrecy. There would, he explained to her, be less chance of capturing the burglars if their exploits became generally known. She was far too astonished at his position to criticize his wonderful story or to see anything suspicious in his agitated manner. Of course she promised to hold her tongue, and then getting through her work with all possible speed, ran back to her home in the village and chattered about what she had seen and heard.

This was the longest day in Paul Raven's life. It seemed to him that it would never come to an end. At last, thinking it dark enough for his task, he procured a spade and went stealthily into a corner of the shrubbery, not very far from the well. The walk, short as it was, bristled with horrors, for he saw a spy behind every tree and bush. Before he began he stopped to listen. Not a leaf moved in the still frosty air; no foot fell upon the hard road behind the high wall of the garden; only the stars looked down upon him, and they were trembling as he was.

When he had removed the snow he found the ground too hard for the spade to penetrate. This discovery quite unnerved him. With parched lips that moved yet spoke not, he leaned heavily upon his spade. Despair gnawed at his heart; was not he fighting against Fate?

But presently he summoned up enough strength to fetch a mattock, with which, terrified at the noise he was obliged to make, he broke the surface. The soil underneath was soft enough for his purpose. Sinking deeper as he turned out the earth, he worked with all his might, only stopping at intervals to peer into the darkness and listen. His labours were not disturbed by anything more startling than a scared rabbit. But even when it scampered through the bushes, there appeared just above the level of the ground a haggard face staring with glassy eyes.

At length the first part of his task was finished, and the dead man was dragged from beneath the bed and out into the garden, the spotless snow shrinking away from the track made by that white-faced toiler and his ghastly burden. Slowly, stopping often on the way, starting at every sound, he approached the dark mound and darker pit in the shrubbery. Then the body was placed in the grave prepared for it; the earth was thrown in and

stamped down; there seemed to be such a terrible amount to spare; the snow was spread over it as carefully as possible; and then Paul Raven staggered back to the house.

But not to sleep, though the night was far advanced; he dared not enter the room in which the dead man had lain. He went into the sitting-room and locked the door, piled up a fire of crackling logs, and pouring out some whisky and water, strove to forget what he had done. But his attempt at cheerfulness was a dismal failure. The liquid in the glass had a loathsome taste of blood; he dashed it into the fire and turned his back on the decanter, which, as he remembered with a shock, he had used last in the company of the dead man.

What had he gained by burying the body? A grisly crop of dragons' teeth had sprung up in its stead. He had argued that, should the burglars return to denounce him, their statement would be uncorroborated and their word would not weigh against his. How painfully weak that argument seemed to him now! He was beset by so many perils that he could not hope to guard against them all. All night long he sat brooding, constructing a hundred plans, and seeing each in turn destroyed by a relentless fate, which never wavered until it had conducted him to the gallows.

Next morning, as soon as it was light enough to see, he crept out into the garden. There had been a fresh fall of snow during the night, and, to his intense relief, the mound was indistinguishable from the rest of the ground. But his footprints were a new source of alarm. In order that they might not be a guide to what he had buried, he compelled himself to walk about, making misleading tracks, but always returning to the shrubbery, which had for him an irresistible fascination. He could not leave it for more than a few moments at a time, he was so afraid lest some one should visit it during his absence.

About eleven o'clock, as he was passing an open window, he thought he heard an unusual stir in the house. With unsteady limbs he hastened inside and found in the hall his wife, who had just arrived. There was a smile on her pretty face, for her sister had been pronounced out of danger, and as she caught sight of her husband, her rosy lips half opened and she advanced with outstretched arms.

But he shrank away from her.

"Lucy," he said distrustfully, "what brings you back?"

She saw his face plainly for the first time, and the sight filled her with even more dismay than his strange question had done.

"What is the matter?" she gasped. "Oh, Paul, how ill you look!"

She tried to take his hand, but with a sudden movement he drew it away. She should not touch that guilty hand. Her eyes rested upon him with astonishment and reproach. Without another word

she led the way into the sitting-room, and he followed silently. Then she closed the door and turned to him again.

"Paul," she said gravely, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing, Lucy, nothing; only I'm worried."

"About what? Why did you snatch your hand away?"

"Because it's hurt."

"Hurt! I am sorry for that, dear," said she tenderly. "How did you do it?"

She approached to kiss him, but again he shrank away from her. She had to lean against the table, so great was her agitation.

"I have had a fight with burglars," he said, almost groaning out the words.

Great heavens, what a morass of falsehood he was stumbling through. But he had to go on and tell the whole story, and she listened with a great pity in her loving eyes and believed it every word. There was no need for him to point, as he did, in corroboration to those stains on the carpet. She shuddered at them as he did, though for a very different reason, and in listening she forgot the strangeness of his manner.

"Oh, Paul," she said, "how can I ever sleep in that bed again after what has taken place around it?"

And he wondered how he could. But he did sleep in the bed that very night. He slept soundly, too, for he was thoroughly exhausted. But next day he again spent the greater part of his time in the garden, hovering round that mound in the shrubbery like a moth round a flame, waiting with dread for the time when it should be exposed to view.

Anxious as he was to leave the neighbourhood, he dared not do so just yet, lest the spade should undo what the spade had done. As the snow melted, he felt rather less uneasy, for it was difficult to see that the surface had recently been disturbed. Still, the soil might sink, dogs might come, and, as he had read, scent his handiwork; a thousand dreadful things might happen. If it was dangerous to stay, it was still more dangerous to go. It was some time before he could tear himself away for even a few hours so as to resume his professional duties.

And now the desire to atone for his act gained strength. Was not he sworn henceforward to the cause of humanity? If only he could save a life, he might hope that the curse had been removed. Though readily seizing every chance of doing good, Raven was always most eager to visit those who were believed to be dying. A few of his patients happened to be seriously ill, and one or two recovered. But when he asked himself whether they would certainly have died without his care, the answer was always doubtful; even the opportunity of making reparation seemed to be denied to him. He scoured the country in pursuit of death; wherever the grim foeman lurked, Raven was sure to present himself, ready to grapple with him and wrench his prey from his grasp. But

misfortune still accompanied the young doctor; notwithstanding all his efforts, he could not count a single success. Almost heart-broken, looking more like a skeleton than a man, he had to confess his failure.

His fears on his own account were suddenly revived in full force. Coming home late one evening, he thought he saw a man watching him. He tottered into the house and, dropping into a chair, said:

"Lucy, those burglars are about again. I can't stand this place; we must leave it."

To throw up the practice in which their money had been sunk meant a heavy loss, if not actual ruin. But the gentle wife offered no opposition. Her husband's health was affected; he would be far better away; that was enough for her.

"When shall we go, dear?" she asked.

"To-morrow," he replied; "the furniture can follow."

Next day, to the surprise of everybody, they disappeared from the neighbourhood, and the gossipmongers could not learn where they had gone. As a matter of fact, they had taken cheap lodgings in London.

Raven, after vainly seeking for a patient pronounced hopeless by every other doctor, took to loitering about dangerous places where lives are often lost. The Thames Embankment was his favourite haunt. How many of those who saw that haggard, shabbily-clad man hurrying along with his eyes fixed hungrily upon the sluggish river, guessed what a strange story was his? It was food that he wanted, many thought, and more than one pitying soul offered him money. Not one had any idea that he was craving for a life to save.

The chance came at last. One dusky evening, shortly after the narrowing lane of lights had begun to flicker along the river, he was passing over Westminster Bridge when he saw a woman clamber up the parapet, jump off and disappear. For the first time for many months—years they seemed to him—Paul Raven felt something like a thrill of joy. With trembling eagerness he mounted the parapet and sprang after the woman.

A policeman saw them go. He looked over the bridge and beheld two objects floating not very far apart in the dark river. One was drifting and the other swimming. A moment later, and they were together. He turned his head away to hail a boat. When he looked next, they had vanished.

When Paul Raven's body was brought ashore and searched, there was found upon it the confession which, with but little alteration, has been set down in these pages. It was no product of an over-excited brain: it was a fact. Four men, subsequently convicted of burglary, corroborated it in the dock.

THE CURTAIN RAISED.

By MARY BATHURST DEANE,

AUTHOR OF "S. BRIAVELS," "UNFORGIVEN," "AUNT JANE'S RELICS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a little dance at Hoppen Court, and small though it was it meant a fortnight's excitement to those young people from the neighbourhood who were bidden to it, for Hoppen was well put away among green hills, where builders came not, and if a rustic family migrated, their cottage stood empty. But Hoppen Court was not dull, for a whole brood of pretty lively girls, with two or three brothers at times, kept a stir of happy life about it.

Lotty Cleeve, who lived in the old rectory with her grandmother and aunt, sent "to town" for a new white silk frock for the dance in order to give a striking proof of emancipation. She was just twenty-one, an heiress in a small way, and, she believed, eminently good-looking. Some people admired the girls at Hoppen Court exceedingly. Lotty considered them over-rated, especially Sylvia, who was her own age, and such a favourite with Mrs. Tom Spenthorpe.

Mrs. Tom Spenthorpe was not an inhabitant of the neighbourhood, but her brother-in-law was the owner of Tanley Place, a rich bachelor, called by men of forty-five "young Spenthorpe," and by youths of twenty "old Godfrey."

The Tom Spenthorpes lived at present on the borders of the Lake of Lucerne, but were staying at Tanley, when the Wenhams gave their little dance at Hoppen. She was very anxious that Godfrey should secure Sylvia Wenham as mistress of Tanley, whose beauties and social value demanded a mistress to turn them to the best account; but had been disagreeably surprised to hear him speak of Lotty Cleeve, whom she had called a "lumpy girl," with considerable interest. Her father had been a very kind friend to him, and he had been one of her guardians up to the present time.

"It is a pumpkin to a peach," Mrs. Tom said to herself, seeing the two girls stand side by side in the course of the little dance at the Court. And yet Lotty was resplendent in her brand-new silk frock "from town," her brown eyes were bright, her complexion brilliant. "A pumpkin to a peach!" No one knew what Godfrey Spenthorpe thought; he sat by his sister's side twisting the end of his moustache, and slightly frowning.

"Godfrey, you are becoming a sort of Mahomet's coffin hanging between the skies of the young and the earthly paradise of the old. Don't you ever dance?"

"Sometimes, but chiefly on my partners' toes, so I spare them much of the painful pleasure. But you will be glad to hear that I am engaged for the next dance to Lotty Cleeve. Tell me who is that Lamia in panoply of jet upon whose arm Lotty is leaning as though they were two lovers in a wood?"

"That, I am told, is a Miss Matsey, governess at the new rectory. She is a striking young woman, but don't you think she paints?"

"A young woman should be a bit of an artist," responded Godfrey with a guileless air. "It strikes me that I have seen her before."

"I hear that she is to spend the holidays with Charlotte Cleeve. I call it simple perversity that with all these charming girls here she should go out of her way to make friends with *her*. Now, Godfrey, what are you 'crumbling' your moustache about? I know it means mischief."

"Reflection," answered Spenthorpe. "I am going to be fascinated by the Lamia. I am quite aware that when you see us deep in conversation together, you will picture her presiding at Tanley."

"I don't like dangerous jests, Godfrey."

"Well, some works of art are too costly for one's means. Sylvia is coming to talk to you, and I am going to be introduced to Lotty Cleeve's friend."

"But Sylvia used to be such a pet of yours," complained Mrs. Tom.

"Excuse me." Godfrey was on his feet with the promptitude characteristic of him. He was soon seen in quiet, apparently interesting talk with the graceful Miss Matsey.

Mrs. Tom, Sylvia, and Lotty glanced at them from time to time, puzzled. Sylvia flitted about among her guests, taking trouble that every one should have their share of attention and amusement, but she was not frankly enjoying herself as her sisters were.

"It was in Berlin I saw you," Mr. Spenthorpe said a little suddenly to Miss Matsey. She turned her golden-brown eyes full upon him smilingly.

"I wish we had met before, it would give me at least a fancy of old acquaintance; I am so very much alone."

"Lord X. was there with his daughter the year I mean," went on Mr. Spenthorpe. "She was a child, scarcely sixteen."

Miss Matsey looked with polite inquiry at him—what were Lord X. and his daughter to her?

The friendship, brand-new and piping-hot between Lotty and Miss Matsey, was only to be satisfied by a meeting every day,

whatever the weather happened to be. On the morning after the dance they met under umbrellas. Lotty was very much pleased with herself. Mr. Spenthorpe had danced three times with her, and notice from him was distinction; moreover, it might lead to something more—a great triumph over the girls at the Court. Why Lotty's innermost soul should crave for a triumph over her old playmates is an unsolved mystery.

She was in reality very anxious to talk it over with her Lina, to woo from her a delicate sympathy and judicious advice. She was not artful, and presently launched into every detail of conversation she had held with him.

Miss Matsey was less responsive than she had expected.

"I'm afraid, dear child, he is not a man to be trusted," she said. "I hope you don't mind my telling you so frankly, Lotty. I have seen too much of the world to be deceived. You must not let him amuse himself with you, dear."

"I shall take very good care of that," asserted Lotty, elevating her chin.

"He began very artfully with me," laughed her friend. "He wanted to pretend that we were old friends. I did not fall into the trap. You are far, far too good for him, Lotty. I will not have you waste a thought on him, dearest."

Lotty was a trifle disappointed, but she was speedily distracted by a most agreeable discussion. Miss Matsey had promised to spend the holidays at the old rectory, but her views extended further than that. She had drawn a fascinating picture of herself and Lotty established in a little flat in London. Lotty burned to emancipate herself from the amiable fuss of grandmamma and aunt. The joys of freedom and patronage would meet together in carrying this scheme into effect, and as Mrs. Spenthorpe was going to take Sylvia abroad with her, Lotty was resolved to take a tour in company with Miss Matsey, after having tasted of the delights of London.

Some weeks passed by after Miss Matsey had become firmly established at the old rectory, and there was a great deal of sitting and whispering in corners, while the grandmother and aunt gently wondered how long the visit was likely to last.

After Miss Matsey's warning against Mr. Spenthorpe, she proved her friendship for Lotty by taking upon herself the whole burden of the conversation, whenever they fell in with him. She made herself a most effectual shield against any treacherous pressing of attentions upon her beloved friend.

At length Miss Matsey said with the utmost sweetness, "Dearest Lotty, we have been a tiny bit dull lately; what do you say to getting up theatricals? you would look too sweet on the stage."

Lotty was enchanted, although her whole experience of acting had been being pushed like a big doll through very small parts in some juvenile performances at Hoppen Court.

Lotty had never been thwarted in her fancies, so Miss Matsey's little plan was swiftly put in train. The poor old rectory's ecclesiastical dust was shaken by all the usual terrors of such an invasion.

The great evening arrived in due time, a large audience was collected, and Miss Matsey was the star, and the only star—perhaps that a tinsel one—of the performance. The actors were delighted with themselves, and a good deal of loud laughing and chattering distinguished the company as it trooped together to join the guests.

Miss Matsey, however, held herself aloof with an air of modest dignity very graceful in the heroine of the evening. She had said to herself “now or never,” as she gazed at her reflection attired in the perfectly successful costume for the sake of which the piece had been chosen. When she saw Godfrey Spenthorpe's hawk face approaching her after supper, she said again, “now or never,” and the colour deepened in her cheek, and a bright spark lit up her golden-syrup eyes.

“Is there any place where we can have a quiet talk, Miss Matsey?” he asked.

She could have wished that she could trace a little anxiety in his steel-blue gaze.

“There is one nook, I think,” she answered softly, and led the way to a small room, which she herself had arranged most carefully, without of course the least idea of holding this interview in it. But it was already tenanted. A rosy damsel who had smiled through the part of the *ingénue* of the piece fanned herself on one seat, and the youthful “manager,” who had taken all the company under his patronage, calling them all by their Christian names after the first rehearsal, occupied the other.

“Not here, not here, my child,” he murmured, as Miss Matsey glanced untenderly upon him.

Mr. Spenthorpe looked as though he saw a blackbeetle and was inclined to tread on it. He led Miss Matsey to the one peaceful spot left, the deserted stage behind the drop scene. He brought forward a couple of cane chairs lately occupied by the unhappily self-conscious lovers of the piece.

“If the curtain were to draw up now,” suggested Miss Matsey.

“A very mistaken impression might be conveyed,” said Mr. Spenthorpe.

His air was collected, almost serious.

“Am I going to have a scolding?” Miss Matsey asked pathetically.

“Miss Matsey,” he began, ignoring the query, “I have never acquired the art of beating about the bush. I have a question or two to put to you. Am I mistaken in supposing that you said you had never been in Berlin?”

She slowly opened her large fan and fanned herself. That was

the one instant she had for finding her feet, when she knew that the ground was slipping from under them.

"Mr. Spenthorpe, I was always bad at a catechism, even when it was put to me by my pastors and masters. If you contemplate putting me through one I must ask your authority."

"Certainly. My right is the particular interest I take in Charlotte Cleeve, of whom until three months ago I was guardian. She proposes to spend some time with you this summer, she tells me."

"And you are jealous of me. I feel flattered. Ah, Mr. Spenthorpe, Lotty has been an angel to me. You cannot guess the isolation, the bitterness, of a lot like mine!"

Mr. Spenthorpe's heart was tough without, tender within; he felt "like a brute."

"I have just come from spending three days at Grey Towers, which is, you know, Lord X.'s place. Shall I say anything more, Miss Matsey?"

"Pray say on. No doubt your story is interesting, though I cannot tell why you should choose me for your audience."

"No? You wish it in the shape of a story. Very well. Lord X. was left a widower with an only daughter, Lady Elisabeth Z., a child of thirteen. He was recommended as a temporary governess a young lady of charming manners and great musical ability. Lady Elisabeth became so attached to this lady that she remained in the family for nearly three years. X. was sent on a political mission to Berlin, and his daughter and her governess accompanied him. The girl, from being very affectionate and unreserved with her father, had become shy and cold. The governess used to lament this openly to him. 'Girls of that age had difficult tempers, and have to be humoured,' she used to say. X. did not at that time think of blaming her for the estrangement, which however was peculiarly distressing to him.

"They were Catholics, and Lady Elisabeth was in the habit of going to early mass attended by her maid. One morning neither she nor the maid came home. The governess did not give the alarm at once; she said afterwards that she was afraid of giving Lord X. uncalled-for worry, but rushed out herself in search of her pupil.

"The child's whole life would have been wrecked to a certainty but for a happy chance—perhaps her good angel was not far off. She was seen by a friend of her father's. One glance into a close carriage showed a scared familiar little face in company with one with which the police had more than a passing acquaintance. In half a moment the blind was violently pulled down, but a signal flew along the street, and the carriage was arrested at the gate. Altogether the runaway was not absent more than a couple of hours, but all the plans were skilfully laid, and but for that one unforeseen check the child only just out of her English nursery

would have been tied to one of the worst of cosmopolitan scum.

"Then arose the question, did she carry on her acquaintance with the rascal—who called himself a Prussian count—merely through those morning walks with the maid? At every other time her governess was with her, and she most solemnly denied all knowledge of the affair.

"However Lady Elisabeth fell ill from the shock and told the whole story. The governess had introduced 'the count,' had encouraged the love-making, had fostered in her terror of her father giving her for stepmother a woman she particularly feared, and of whom Lord X. had never thought; and finally persuaded her that she had so far committed herself that she was bound to run away with the man. The girl declared that she had been frightened into it, and was only too thankful to escape. It is a gruesome story, but my reason for telling it is a strong one. The name of the governess was Lina Matsey."

Miss Matsey rose from her seat and shut her fan abruptly,

"Yes," she said, in a low trembling voice, "a lonely, friendless woman like myself is at the mercy of a cowardly, truthless girl. I am hunted down."

"No," said Spenthorpe. "Far from it. You are competent to give first-rate music lessons if you consent to set up in town. I will engage that you have a fair start on condition that you break off with Miss Cleeve, and promise never to take a private situation again."

She looked into his steel-blue eyes with sharp scrutiny, and then subsided into contemptuous indifference.

"Your ideas are singularly crude," she observed, sitting down again.

"I daresay, but that is of small consequence at this moment. Do you accept the terms?"

Miss Matsey laughed. "Oh, you amuse me, you country squire! I am to renounce my domestic slavery for worse drudgery. Can you picture me trudging about in all weathers to teach the scales to red-fingered girls? Frankly, I have resigned my charming situation. I came because they were rich, easy-going people, but it is paying too dearly for carriages and comfort. Lotty is another matter. She is her own mistress, and if she prefers my company and London to stagnation in a village, who is to prevent it? We fight with equal weapons there!"

At this moment the curtain trembled and began wrinkling at the foot. They both observed it and rose; a suppressed laugh was just audible.

Miss Matsey fell fainting into his arms with that perilous *abandon* so effective on the stage, and which requires much practice. He caught her firmly under the arms, and placed her on a chair to fall off or to support herself as she listed. He was quite aware

that she was no more faint than he was. Up ran the curtain, and at one bound he had knocked over the lank figure of "the manager," who had the cord in his hand.

"Hullo, young man! I'm afraid I almost bowled you over!" said Mr. Spenthorpe mildly, watching the furious youth pick himself up gasping and rumped.

"I—I don't know what you call 'almost,'" he spluttered.

"I'll explain," and Spenthorpe's tone changed to sudden severity. "You have had almost too much champagne, sir, and it is time you went home." He seized the arm of the discomfited one in a hard grip, and led him away in the face of two or three other abashed young persons, who had rashly ventured to attempt playing a trick upon the master of Tanley.

"See that this gentleman has his hat and coat, Stephens," he said to his own man, who was in the hall, and turned away quite sure that the youth's impudence was taken out of him for that evening.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Lotty went to her friend in order to receive praise and congratulation upon the success of the party, she found the fair Lina in deep depression.

"I must leave you, dearest," she said, embracing her. "I had letters this morning of which I did not tell you. I am going to town; I wish you were coming with me."

"I will," cried Lotty. "It will be horridly dull now everything is over, and as for Mr. Spenthorpe, he is always here, and, of course, I don't care a button for him—cross old thing!"

"Lotty, I have cruel enemies; listen, dear." Then Miss Matsey told her version—thoroughly revised from the original—of the story of her former pupil. Of course Lotty was violently on her side.

Spenthorpe, poor guileless man, had not calculated upon this simple scheme. He found Lotty forearmed against all he had to say; but Lotty was annoyed and put out. She did not want to offend him; she might—she did not know. She liked to think it was in her power to have Tanley, and certainly he had had thoughts of her.

Miss Matsey reassured her. Mr. Spenthorpe was just the sort of man to care more for her if she gave him the trouble to come after her.

Then Lotty, with great abruptness, announced to her astonished relatives that she and her friend were going up to town for a time. She should come back and see them sometimes, of course; but she wanted to see a little more of the world. It was done in a villainous, heartless manner, but Lotty was delighted with herself.

She had not a thought for any one in the world besides herself and "Lina."

There was no delay. Miss Matsey had no longer any motive for stopping at Hoppen, and started for town with a good packet of bank notes in her purse, and her boxes stuffed with presents from Lotty.

Spenthorne came to the old rectory, and found they were gone. "He made a great fuss about what was no business of his," said Lotty, and set the two old ladies helplessly wavering between the two opposite versions of the Berlin story.

Miss Matsey had to discover that Lotty as her own mistress was not the pliable being she had expected, but excessively obstinate and self-opinionated. In spite of her infatuation for her friend she had to be humoured, and Miss Matsey foresaw trouble. The girl was jealous, and required to be caressed and flattered without stint. Lina groaned over the dire necessity of paying in one way or another for the pleasant things of life.

Lotty came to town with the fresh appetite of a country girl for amusement. Theatres especially were her delight, and she was absolutely without discrimination in her tastes. Miss Matsey preferred certain theatres to anything else, but she did not care to be dragged to circuses and all the smaller entertainments. Lotty was like a schoolboy set loose upon tarts. She was never tired; she did not care about making new acquaintances; but she liked to tear about in cabs for sixteen out of the twenty-four hours, "seeing something," or buying something.

A proof that she was a little bit afraid of Miss Matsey was that she never ventured to ask her where she had been, or who she had been with when that lady absented herself. Lina seemed to have a good many friends, although she did not introduce Lotty to them. But at length, one day, she said:

"Lotty, dear, I want to take you to see a little woman I know—an American, Mrs. Triggs Campbell. I have promised to look in this evening and to bring you. It is quite the thing to know her; every one is talking about her."

Lotty was delighted, but could not get Miss Matsey to answer any questions about the lady.

They drove to the "Langham," and were shown into a private sitting-room lit with pink lamps, and profusely decorated with highly-scented flowers. There was a bizarre confusion of ornamental objects superadded to the utter commonplace of the small room.

Mrs. Triggs Campbell came rustling forward to meet them—a sort of embodied tropical flower. Her face was of distinct pink and white, in Lotty's eyes very lovely. Her dark sparkling eyes looked out from below a curled mass of light yellow hair decorated with topazes and gold. Her long, straight-falling gown was of rich amber satin frecked with brown irregular spots of velvet, like those

on the lip of an orchid, with a deep border of gold work and beetles' wings.

Instead of the conventional welcome Lotty expected, she was received in the open arms of this dazzling apparition, and kissed on either cheek. Now in her small soul Lotty was as conventional a being as ever emerged from an English village, and recoiled the least little bit from this unlooked-for reception. But the momentary awkwardness that seized her was quickly dispelled by the frank voice and warmth of manner in which Mrs. Campbell declared her pleasure in making her acquaintance.

Holding her hands she said to Miss Matsey: "It is as I told you—this dear child has often come to me in my spirit dreams. Do you not see chains of flowers stretching around her and twining about me?"

"You know what a very earthly person I am," returned Miss Matsey. "I can't see your marvels, though of course I believe in them."

"We will make you see in time," said Mrs. Campbell softly. "You, dear child, do not you experience a peculiar feeling when you approach me?"

"I don't know; I think I do," murmured Lotty, who was chiefly engaged in wondering what scent the lady used, and why there was a stuffed tiger near the fireplace.

"Ah, we shall know one another better soon," said Mrs. Campbell caressingly.

"It's too soon to begin initiation yet; let us amuse ourselves," struck in Miss Matsey gaily. "Any one coming to you to-night?"

"One or two inquirers," murmured Mrs. Campbell abstractedly. Then they took comfortable chairs, and drank coffee, while Lotty listened to the bright airy talk of the other two, with a dim idea that a brilliant play was being acted for her exclusive benefit. Lina laughed heartily when she told her this afterwards.

Then three men entered almost simultaneously. One of them was a handsome man with a big fair moustache, who was introduced to her as Mrs. Campbell's brother "Adolph." Miss Matsey called him "count." Lotty felt a little confused, for she had not supposed there were American counts—no, the foreign title must have been conferred, probably for military service.

He took the entertainment of the young stranger upon himself at once with the greatest good-nature, and presently Miss Matsey followed Mrs. Campbell, and leaning over her chair joined in the talk of the other group. Of the two strangers one was of the gilded youth species, the other gaunt and shabby; but they were alike hanging eagerly upon the words of occult wisdom that flowed from the pink lips of Mrs. Triggs Campbell.

From time to time Lotty overheard broken sentences such as, "Each precious stone has its secret—we shall work them all out

in time—patience, patience is needed—and sympathetic souls.” “And this unknown colour ‘zool’—awfully funny to know of a colour nobody else knows—call my two-year-old ‘Zool,’ good winning name, you know—the greatest fortune the world has seen yet;” this last murmur from the lean shabby man. “Electricity is but a glimmer——” Mrs. Campbell again.

“How wonderful Mrs. Campbell seems,” said Lotty to the handsome Adolph.

“Say she is opening new worlds, beyond me I confess; but she has extraordinary powers. She can make these two men do what she pleases, and they are only two out of hundreds.”

Then Adolph returned to the task of amusing Lotty—not a very difficult one. They were playing some infantile species of gambling game, in which Lotty won several mechanical toys, which she was delighted to play with.

“Heavens!” said Miss Matsey under her breath, “how wonderful these English country girls are. They ought to be in their cradles till they are five-and-twenty.”

“You, on the other hand, *ma chère*, represent those who never needed a cradle,” laughed Mrs. Campbell.

When Lotty was reminded that it was time to go home, she felt like a child of seven fetched from its first dance.

“Oh, what a perfect evening,” she sighed.

“I must not take you there too often,” Miss Matsey said jokingly. And in point of fact, Lina did not seem anxious to encourage the acquaintance, but Lotty took the bit between her teeth, and diligently sought every opportunity of cementing the friendship so happily begun. She went headlong into it, as she had done into intimacy with Miss Matsey.

One day, Mrs. Triggs Campbell asked her to go back with them to the charming house on the Lake of Lucerne, where her husband was waiting for her to join him, having been to Paris about furnishing.

Lotty’s ecstasies knew no bounds. Miss Matsey received the news with cynical calm. “I wonder what will become of me if you desert me, Lotty,” she said presently.

“How can you, Lina? Of course we will go abroad together—some other time. I suppose you could not come too? But anyhow, you will keep on the flat while I am away. I have heaps of money; such a lot has been saved.”

Lotty was less interested in the strange things that went on at Mrs. Campbell’s *séances*, which were attended by from six to ten persons at a time, than in the lady herself, and the fair moustached Adolph. She did not care about seeing her double, finding out how to make a fabulous fortune by one stroke, or looking into the future, beyond the assurance that she “would marry a very handsome man, and be very rich and happy.” The “very handsome man” could not be Mr. Spenthorpe; Lotty began to regard

that gentleman as a bore. Now certainly the count was strikingly handsome.

"So you are going," remarked Lina, when all was settled. "Well, we are straws on the wind. I never expect anything to last, and I don't know that I want it. All right, I'll keep house for you till you turn up again."

"What will you do to amuse yourself?" Lotty asked.

"Go on the stage probably; a friend has offered me an engagement."

Lotty was astonished. She had heard Lina speak of having known certain actresses, yet looked upon them still as beings apart.

"I thought you said it required so much training," she ventured to remark.

To which her friend made no reply.

CHAPTER III.

DURING the journey from London to Paris, Mrs. Campbell was accommodating enough to throw aside all signs of the mystic, and to show herself a shrewd woman of business. It appeared, however, that she was very delicate, and required a great many doses of something she declared to be horrid stuff, to keep her up. In Paris she persuaded Lotty to buy some beautiful sapphires set with brilliants, the lucky stones for her to wear, she told her. Lotty enjoyed the importance of spending a large sum of money, but Mrs. Campbell said she should not allow her to become extravagant and took charge of her cash-box.

They arrived hot and weary in the dancing morning sunlight at Lucerne, and were met by Mr. Triggs Campbell, a big orange-bearded man, with a manner Lotty found rather over-familiar. Still, she was shy, and his frank, free-and-easy bearing put her at her ease. Lotty was not hypercritical about manners.

It proved to be a longish drive to the chalet, which Mrs. Campbell had described as a rustic gem, overlooking the blue waters of the lake.

The first sight of it proved that she had fallen into the common practice of describing things rather as she wished them to be than as they were. The chalet was desolate and dark, amid overgrown neglected vegetation. There was no garden, and the lake was not visible from it. An untidy Swiss girl opened the door.

"Our household as well as our furniture come from Paris next week, dear," said Mrs. Campbell cheerfully. "I wish we could have been quite smart to welcome you, but we shall all have to rough it a bit for a few days."

"I don't know your views about luxuries, my dear young lady," said Mr. Campbell, "but they are essential to Mrs. Campbell. I

shall call you Lotty, it's an endearing little name, and we want you to feel at home. I am Fred, and my wife's Mimi. Oh, here's 'Dolph."

Yes, there was the count in a cloud of tobacco smoke, between the wreaths of which he kissed his sister, and pressed Lotty's hand.

She was shown her room. "You speak German of course, dear love," said Mrs. Campbell.

"Not a word. I thought I told you so."

"Never mind; of course the servants understand nothing else, but you will soon get on."

It was a very odd thing, Adolph at the chalet was not so handsome as Adolph at the "Langham"; perhaps it was that he never dressed with pains in this family party.

The chalet was meagrely furnished. Lotty, who loved to be comfortable, looked in vain for anything she cared to sit on besides the couch appropriated to Mrs. Campbell.

When she came down for coffee, she found her reclining on it, having just taken a dose of her cordial.

"It smells rather like brandy," observed Lotty, who had the very slightest possible acquaintance with that useful liquid.

"My love, it is a pure vegetable essence," explained Mrs. Campbell. "Fancy drinking brandy."

"Of course I knew it was not," Lotty hastened to add.

Mrs. Campbell did not look her best; she was wrapped in an old black cashmere tea-gown lined with faded blue, with very dirty lace ruffles.

"My treasure of a maid has been obliged to stop in Paris," she said, catching the direction of Lotty's eyes; "I don't know what I shall do—I am a foolish, helpless wretch."

"I hope you will let me be of use to you," Lotty suggested.

"You darling! Fred has got one of his friends with him, a person of importance, you see," Mrs. Campbell went on. "It is 'Dolph we shall look to to entertain us; there is no one like 'Dolph. Fred is terribly sought after on political affairs. Letters with royal signatures are quite common with us, my dear."

At a little distance Mr. Campbell was deep in conversation with a grimy German.

Adolph strolled in and began to make himself agreeable.

"Are they talking about that wonderful colour 'zool'?" Lotty asked, glancing towards the other two men.

To her discomfiture, Mrs. Campbell broke into a shrill prolonged peal of laughter. Adolph frowned, and muttered something about "a fool." "She is over-excited," he said; "you had better go to your room and rest, Mimi."

"It's my head," sighed his sister, and waving a kiss to Lotty, left the room.

"I want to unpack," Lotty remarked, "so I shall go too." She

did not always know what to say to Adolph, and did not care to be left with the three men.

Presently she came to Mrs. Campbell's door, with a timid knock, and presented a very pale face and round eyes to her friend.

"I have lost," she faltered—"I can't think how it happened—my sapphires, and my pearl necklace and earrings."

"My dear love," shrieked Mrs. Campbell, "you must be mistaken. A pearl necklace? Not of any value I hope?"

"Oh, yes; it was left to me, and aunt did not want me to take it to London. There were diamonds in the pendants, and—what shall I do?"

"Another railway robbery at the frontier, I'm afraid!" Mrs. Campbell exclaimed. Then running to her own box she dived into it, and throwing up her hands with a shriek, cried "Oh, heavens, my ruby bracelet, given me by the Princess of Crustenberg Rollstein, is gone! It is worth eighty guineas."

Upon hearing of these losses Mr. Campbell was greatly agitated, swore a good deal, and declared that he would show the authorities that he was not to be trifled with—he would send off half a dozen telegrams at once.

Lotty could not sleep that night, and rose early, meaning to go in search of the lake and distant snow peaks before the others were up. She was met at the door by Mr. Campbell in very *négligé* costume, who told her that the air was most pernicious in that country when the dews were rising, and that if the natives saw her straying about alone they would be rude to her. "We must have the pleasure of showing you our sights, my dear," he said, and Lotty was sure he meant to be kind, though she was rather disappointed when she was told that the middle of the day was too hot for walking, and that she must wait till the evening.

More shaggy Germans came in and out; Mr. Campbell was always busy, Mrs. Campbell languid.

However, after the evening meal, the two gentlemen took Lotty in a boat on the lake, although by that time it was too dark to see anything. "We shall see the fireworks all the better," said Mr. Campbell.

There was a *fête* being held in Lucerne. The hotels were illuminated, a band was playing in front of the "International," and double semi-circles of lights were prettily reflected in the water. Boats hung with coloured lanterns were swaying about, somewhat crowded together, in the darkness. They were dangerous neighbours, unskilfully managed by rough noisy crews. Fireworks blazed, and rockets fell among them. Moving about on the black water, with the voices of invisible people around her was very strange and exciting to Lotty. She realized that she was in a foreign country.

She felt sure that evening that Adolph was in love with her. He had evidently been carried away from the first time they had

met. It was unfortunate for him, for Lotty did not think she was in love with him, and moreover, Lotty had been brought up under the very wing of Mrs. Grundy, and she must know something more certain about the social standing of a man before she thought of marrying him. She doubted Adolph being wealthy, and her dream was to marry a very rich man.

The three days that followed were all hot, and Lotty began to weary of being kept indoors till the evening. "When shall I see the country?" she asked.

"Next week, my dear child, when Mimi is recovered and I am less busy," answered Mr. Campbell. "You would not like to go about with only 'Dolph, would you?"

"Certainly not."

"But there is no harm in letting him row you about the lake; it is good for you, and he is very good-natured," put in Mrs. Campbell from her sofa.

So evening after evening found the pair gliding about the calm waters just after the sun went down. Lotty found it very romantic, and ventured to coquet a little—a very little be it said—but as much as she knew how, with her admirer. As such she undoubtedly classed Adolph now—poor fellow, she could not help feeling sorry for him; of course he did not dream of any return of affection!

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was no sign of servants or furniture from Paris, and the chalet continued to be as uncomfortable as it was possible to be. Lotty had always imagined an air of luxury about life abroad, and it struck her that on the whole her experience so far had not been happy.

One afternoon Mr. Campbell was writing and smoking, with bottle and glass at his elbow, according to his custom, when she hurried into the room.

"Oh, do come, I am sure Mimi is dreadfully ill!" she exclaimed. "I went to her room, she called out in such an odd voice, 'Come along in, whoever you are!' She has some fever and does not know what she is saying. Could I go to Lucerne for a doctor?"

Mr. Campbell pushed his chair back, and with a heavy frown went out of the room saying: "Don't trouble yourself. She has these nervous attacks sometimes. She will be all right to-morrow."

But Lotty was really uneasy. She was terrified lest Mrs. Campbell should die and leave her there, with a wholly selfish terror. She followed Mr. Campbell upstairs, therefore, and listened outside the door.

To her amazement she heard the two voices in high altercation. Mr. Campbell was swearing at his wife—Lotty trembled—but Mrs. Campbell was swearing at her husband—and Lotty fled downstairs,

to think the matter over with a lingering hope that it was the delirium of fever.

At supper no remark to that effect was made, although the invalid did not appear.

Then Lotty said to herself, "She must be mad!" She felt greatly frightened.

"The boat is ready," Adolph whispered. Two of the German friends were present, and she was vexed to notice smiles exchanged among them and their host.

"I think I shall stop at home," she said sullenly.

"No, we are in the way, and I want to talk things over with you."

Adolph's manner was determined, so Lotty went.

"Really, I don't think I can stay here much longer," she began hurriedly as she stepped into the boat. "It is so inconvenient with Mimi always ill—it is like being alone."

He pulled away from the landing place before answering.

"Lotty, you are very heartless to talk about leaving us in that way," he said, when they were out on the lake, now purple under the evening sky.

"I must go some time," she answered awkwardly.

He rested on his oars and looked in her face. "No, Lotty—dearest Lotty—you must never leave—unless I go with you."

She stared blankly at him. Lotty's ways were not pretty. She opened her mouth, and it remained open, for she did not know what to say.

Seizing one of her hands, he then proceeded to explain in forcible words that he adored her, that he meant to marry her, that if she refused him he would shoot her first and then himself, that he lived only in the light of her smiles, and so on and so on. Lotty's head began to spin round.

"It's all a dreadful mistake!" she gasped.

At that moment their boat was taken by the wave of the last steamer of the day, whose "pant, pant" and red light had been rapidly coming nearer while the impassioned scene was going on.

Lotty shrieked loudly when she felt the sudden bound of the boat, and he held her down. "There is no danger while I am with you, dearest," he said soothingly, and kissed the hand he held. "I am yours, Lotty—yours only, and we will live in Paris and make every one envious of us."

"But I can't, I don't want to—I don't—I won't!" cried Lotty incoherently. "I must go home—why, you are almost a stranger to me!"

"Come, Lotty, this won't do. You are twenty-one, you know, and responsible for your actions. My dear child, you are as good as engaged to me already—you have been out with me alone every day. What do you suppose I intended? Bah, you are no baby!"

Lotty tried to argue the matter. Adolph cut her short.

"Look here, Lotty, we don't return to the *châlet* without your promise to be my wife; I give you notice. I have plenty of cigars, and the nights are warm, but I think you have more sense than to oblige me to keep you here for many hours."

In a moment, as it were, the veil was lifted, and Lotty saw her peril and her folly in their dreadful nakedness.

"I will never consent," she said doggedly.

It happened that Adolph had fancied her fears would be very easily worked upon, but he had not reckoned with the obstinacy with which she was blest. His threat had roused all the opposition of her nature, the stubbornness of her temper. Her fear once thoroughly aroused was no timorous flutter, but a deep, silent feeling full of suspicion and distrust. She seemed upon the brink of a morass and resolved to remain passive, dreading what another step might bring.

Two hours, three hours passed by. Then Adolph gave in and rowed to the landing-place.

At the door of the *châlet* Mr. Campbell met them with a very angry countenance. It was after midnight.

He began to storm at them both. "It was disgraceful; it was monstrous." Adolph broke in: "Be quiet. Lotty is engaged to me; she has promised to be my wife."

Lotty shrieked a denial which Mr. Campbell disregarded.

"All right," he said cheerfully, "that alters the case. Of course after this nothing else was possible. Who would have guessed you likely to be so skittish, Miss Lotty? Well, all's well that ends well."

"It is a mistake. I am not going to marry him. I shall go home to-morrow!" cried Lotty.

"Come, come, no nonsense!" Mr. Campbell said gruffly; while Adolph, placing a hand on her shoulder which she tried vainly to shake off, said:

"You must not be so childish, my dear Lotty. After giving me every encouragement I cannot think so badly of you as to take you in earnest when you attempt to play the coquette."

The two men then walked away together, and Lotty, indignant and really terrified, retreated to her room and flung herself on her bed in tears.

Early next morning she crept downstairs with her hat on and letters in her pocket for Miss Matsey and Godfrey Spenthorpe. Fear made her put up with the humiliation of appealing to him. The hall door was locked, and Mr. Campbell sauntered up dangling the key from his little finger.

"My dear," he began insolently, "it's not pretty manners in a *fiancée* to try to run away. Do you know what they do with little girls who play such pranks in Switzerland?—say they are not in their right minds and lock them up till they become sane—or mad."

He fixed his eyes upon her with dreadful meaning. Lotty fled from him. In the course of the day she gave the letters to the sullen woman servant, the only one she had seen, imploring her to post them, with a bribe of ten francs—it was her only chance, though but a slight one.

She had a stormy interview with Mrs. Campbell, who coaxed, urged, argued, ridiculed, threatened by turns. Lotty's terror increased on finding that one and all had made up their minds that she was going to marry Adolph. Her protestations were received with impatience and disregard.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Campbell, "you put yourself in my hands, carry on an outrageous flirtation with my brother, then fly out at us all round. You may as well be calm; there is not an English person nearer than Lucerne, and you are not in Lucerne."

"Am I your prisoner, then!" she cried walking about the room in a fever of excitement.

"To-day you are," answered Mr. Campbell; "to-morrow we leave, and next day you will be 'Dolph's wife—and may think yourself lucky."

Lotty by this time felt a sickening dread of Mr. Campbell. Every word he uttered seemed to veil some hideous threat. She went to her room and resolved to pack up her possessions and watch for a chance of escape. Alas for her pearl necklace and the sapphires! But there was soon small room in Lotty's distracted mind for such regrets.

She collected her trinket cases, opened them, found them empty without exception. Her cash box was in Mrs. Campbell's possession, and her cheque book had vanished. Beyond a few francs in her purse she was absolutely penniless—and without money how could she get away, even if the chance presented itself.

Panic seized her, she was absolutely in their hands. She had not experience enough to suggest that, could she succeed in reaching Lucerne, the English Consul would assist her, yet to Lucerne she resolved to get if possible. It was plain even to her simple mind that she had fallen into a trap. Her comprehension was assisted by the abrupt change that had taken place in the manner of the three towards her.

Mr. Campbell had shown himself brutal, Adolph insolent, Mrs. Campbell coarse and heartless. They were so confident of having her in their power that all attempt to keep up appearances dropped.

"Surely," Adolph had said with a disagreeable smile of mockery, "my fair friend Lina Matsey gave me a good character?"

"She is no friend of yours!" Lotty had cried; and he had responded with the same air of mockery, "Oh, indeed, she is; an old friend."

It was evening, and she was sitting still, gazing at her rifled

boxes, when a knock came at her door. In an agony of fear she jumped up. It proved to be only the maid-servant bringing a cup of coffee and a roll.

Directly the woman had left she dragged the heaviest articles she could move in front of the door. She did not mean to go to bed, an indefinable terror had laid hold of her. Putting aside the roll to eat in the morning, she drank the coffee, and soon after a strange sensation took possession of her.

It seemed as though the working of her brain suddenly ran up to fever intensity. She had been afraid of falling asleep, but now sleep seemed the last thing she need dread. All manner of incongruous scenes ran races across her memory. For one instant she thought she might be going mad; then said to herself, "No, I am only over-excited."

Night came on; she sat listening to every sound. The house became quiet, and the silence was broken only by the loud croaking of the frogs outside.

Then stealthy steps approached her door. With her heart wildly beating, she piled up everything she could lay hands on against it. There was a low whispering, and the steps stole away. Then longing, like an acute physical pain, came over her for the sight of some familiar face. She began to review the past, and little by little put together words and actions that should have warned her what manner of people these were.

Why did she trust a woman who upon her own showing was audaciously unprincipled? Why did she put aside and stifle instinctive doubts of Adolph?

They were strong and she was weak, they were unscrupulous and she was helpless. She shuddered at the recollection of her little boastings about the money she had just come into. Of course she owed the whole scheme to the hope of securing it.

"If I do not escape to-morrow morning, I shall be married to that wretch," she moaned, feeling altogether beaten, like a feeble moth out in a storm. "They can easily starve me out."

She paced up and down her room, trusting that no one would dare to intrude upon her while she was heard to be moving about, and poured out a glass of water to drink in case she felt drowsy.

The dreary hours dragged on, dawn broke, and no sounds were to be heard in the house. Were they lying in wait?

* * * * *

Godfrey Spenthorne was sitting on the terrace of his brother's charming house, looking over the blue lake which lapped the gardens, and beyond to the glittering snow peaks. It was a lovely scene—as some people said, too lovely to be real—aërial and dream-like, with châteaux, like pretty toys set here and there just to look at, on vivid green patches amid groups of trees. The postman walked across the fields, came up the garden, and put a letter into

his hand. It was from Lotty Cleeve's aunt, telling him that the girl had gone abroad with people unknown to them, that she had merely said their name was "Triggs Campbell," and that they were going to Lucerne. Would he kindly find out all about them?

"Have they never heard of looking for a needle in a haystack?" Mr. Spenthorne wondered. But he presently took a boat and rowed up to Lucerne to make inquiries.

He had not been well pleased with Lotty's proceedings, his attempt to give the girl a place in his heart for her father's sake had been a signal failure. He was rather vexed with a lurking sense of relief he experienced when she made her strike for independence. He could not get up the slightest tenderness.

He had refused his brother's invitation steadily at first, but suddenly veered round and said he was coming.

He found Sylvia established there, a welcome and charming guest, but he was a perverse man—so Mrs. Spenthorne said—he took little notice of her. Did he though? His niece Maia, Sylvia's friend, with the lynx eyes of her age, pretended to see right through his indifference, and to discover a special interest in Sylvia behind it. He told his sister-in-law about the letter from Hoppen, and she discontentedly told herself that here was an end of her hopes about her dear Sylvia. Godfrey's unaccountable fancy for that "lumpy girl" would be revived.

Early next morning the young people, including a boy brother of Maia's, had their swim in the lake before the sun had had time to attain his fiery heat. This delicious bath of crystal clearness and luxurious coolness having been duly enjoyed, and great feats of skill performed, the trio were coming very gaily up the garden when they saw the surprising apparition of a panting excited girl in unmistakably English hat and white frock running towards them.

"Oh save me!" she shrieked out with a frantic air, "I am robbed—oh, does any one speak English here?"

"Lotty!" cried Sylvia, and at the familiar sound, the girl flew at Sylvia, clung to her, and with hysterical sobs besought her to hide her away anywhere.

They took her into the house, and to Mrs. Spenthorne.

Here was indeed an extraordinary reappearance of "the lumpy girl," for whom she had such a prophetic distaste!

Lotty gasped out her story when she had been revived with some wine and water. She had watched in breathless agony until she heard the servant go to the door for the morning milk. Flying downstairs she made one desperate push past her—she showed the torn muslin of her frock where the woman had clutched at her, and not knowing which way to take, ran on and on, hoping she was going towards Lucerne—which luckily for her she was not. Suddenly she came upon a gate among the trees between stone pillars; it was open—happy chance—she pushed it, and found

herself in private grounds. Her fear was then of coming upon some of the Campbells' German friends, and who could express her joy when she heard her own name uttered, and saw—for the first time with pleasure unalloyed by envy—the beautiful face of her old playfellow?

There was a ring at the door, and Lotty in a fresh access of terror heard the voice of Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Tom Spenthorpe went to speak to him in the hall, Godfrey had gone into Lucerne.

"A thousand pardons for this intrusion," began Mr. Campbell with much affability, "but I have come in search of a little ward of mine—a poor young lady who is—" he tapped his forehead.

"Miss Cleeve, you mean," replied Mrs. Spenthorpe. "Not a ward, but a visitor. I am acquainted with her friends, and she will now remain with us until her return to England."

"Then I presume you will hold yourself responsible for her expenses. The young lady contracted to stop with my wife and me *en pension* for three months. I shall hold her to the agreement. It was on her account I took the chalet."

"I will look into it. The gentleman who is one of her trustees is at present staying with me as it happens. He will ascertain the facts of the case."

Mr. Campbell muttered and blustered a little in his orange beard, but was perhaps not reluctant to be bowed out.

A messenger was sent for Godfrey, who presently arrived at the chalet, accompanied by a couple of gendarmes, in time to see the back of a travelling carriage rapidly disappearing. The chalet was empty but for the maid-servant, who was just starting off with the keys in her hand.

"They were too wide awake to take the train from Lucerne," said Godfrey.

The "Campbells" were not heard of again, but it is not improbable that under some other name they are still engaged in baiting traps for the unwary, and confabulating with the discontented of one nation or another.

Lotty was sent back to Hoppen with her dearly-bought experience, when she had recovered from her fright, and the results of what the doctor said was an overdose of opium. Miss Matsey had vanished, but some time after some one curiously like her was seen in Paris in company with some one curiously like "Mr. Campbell."

"Is there any chance of finding Lotty Cleeve my hostess when next I come to Tanley?" Mrs. Spenthorpe asked with a spice of malice.

"I think not," Godfrey answered with quiet emphasis.

Adolph was heard of again. Circumstances over which he had no control brought him into public notice, when a too-curious investigation of his life and adventures brought to light the fact

that he was identical with the "Prussian count" of poor little Lady Elisabeth's misadventure. At that time he had no "sister," or other relative unless rumour was correct in ascribing to him a wife.

Godfrey Spenthorpe was in no hurry to get back to England. One lovely summer morning his brother found him sitting with Sylvia on the cliff walk. It was cool and delightful, but they seemed dull, he thought—had probably exhausted small talk—so he good-naturedly sat down and helped them with a cheerful monologue. Sylvia strolled away after a time, and finding he could get not a word out of his brother, Mr. Tom presently sauntered off on a visit to his live stock. Godfrey and Sylvia turned up very late for luncheon. Mrs. Spenthorpe laughed when her husband mentioned this incident of the morning, and surprised him by calling him "a goose."

About a year later they both went on a visit to Tanley Place, and were received with great cordiality by the master thereof and his charming young wife—Sylvia.

"For two mortal hours did Tom sit and prose," declared Godfrey, "while I was waiting for Sylvia's answer."

"I wonder that did not put a stop to it altogether, for it gave Sylvia time for reflection," observed Maia, with the impertinence of a favourite niece.

"Though after all it was of small consequence, as I should not have taken 'no' for an answer," continued Godfrey calmly.

"Unless," remarked Sylvia, "you had had a chance with Miss Matsey. We never heard quite the genuine version of that story about the raising of the curtain at Hoppen."

"Thus it is that Mrs. Grundy's burs stick!" said Godfrey resignedly.

AFFINITIES.

By Mrs. ALEXANDER FRASER.

How often in life's chequered way
A Being o'er our path doth stray,
Whose spirit mingling with our own
Sheds a bright gladness erst unknown ;
Whose course is turned too soon aside !
Whose stream with ours no more can glide !
But 'midst the rush of worldly ill,
Whose image in our soul dwells still,
And deep with pictured memory fraught,
Lingers in many a secret thought !

THE FIRST SOPRANO OF ST. MARGARET'S.

By EDITH STEWART DREWRY,

AUTHOR OF "ON DANGEROUS GROUND," "ONLY AN ACTRESS," "SEEN IN A MIRROR,"
ETC., ETC.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE CLERGY HOUSE.

"I HAVE done everything that can possibly be done, as you know," said the Vicar, folding his arms on the writing-table before him in grim despair as he looked in the precentor's face. "I've advertised in the Church papers and leading dailies even, and offered very liberal terms—quite exceptional, in fact—to meet the urgency of our most unfortunate emergency, but not one answer has proved the least bit of use. We must have a first soprano who has a fine voice, well trained, and thoroughly capable of reading difficult music at sight exceptionally well."

"Yes," said the precentor; "but here we are within ten days of our dedication festival, with our gifted friend Mowbray's splendid and difficult music, composed for us with a lot of solo soprano work, and we are still without a substitute for the boy who has learned and rehearsed it all—ugh! it's maddening. Couldn't we possibly—just for once—" the curate hesitated.

"Well?" exclaimed the Superior eagerly.

"Why—I know you've always been very strong against such unecclesiastical proceedings, but, still—we might get down a professional singer and put her behind the——"

"Certainly not," interrupted the vicar sternly, with let us hope only the "anger that sins not," but with a decidedly worldly frown, nevertheless. "No, Fenwick, if our last hope—this week's *Church Times*' advertisement—proves futile, there is nothing for it but to give up Mowbray's entire music."

"That boy ought to be well whipped for his disobedience," said the precentor with a Christian fervour due entirely, no doubt, to

his pious interest in the derelict chorister's spiritual well-being; "he was forbidden to go near that smallpox house."

The corners of the vicar's firm, pleasant mouth gave just a little, but he said nothing. His own vexation and disappointment were as keen as his curate's—perhaps deeper and more personal, for Mowbray, the rising composer, was the son of an old friend, and great hopes were built on this music; but George Fenwick was a young man of thirty—Charles Haughton nigh on fifty, and long years of the world's battle teaches one to accept the inevitable with the stoicism of a practical philosopher.

Dr. Haughton, called by his people "Father Haughton," had been for nearly twenty years the Vicar of St. Margaret's, a high church on the outskirts of an important seaside town, and even the bitterest enemy of the Catholic movement—the most "aggrieved parishioners" who did not live in the parish at all—must have admitted that if St. Margaret's held a foremost rank for the beauty and perfection of its music and services, it held an equally good name for the energy, ceaseless labour and efficiency with which its populous district was worked.

"You gave the address here, at the Clergy House?" said the precentor after a pause.

"Yes, of course—either by letter or personal application," returned the Superior rising—a tall, imposing-looking man in his cassock. "Ah! a tap at the door—come in. Well, Gilbert," as the page boy appeared, "what is it?"

"Please, sir, a young gentleman wants to see you very particularly—something about an advertisement, he said, sir."

The two priests exchanged a look that went from one to the other like an electric flash.

"Show him in, Gilbert," said Father Haughton, resuming his seat.

The page obeyed; there was a light, almost noiseless footfall on the carpet, and the youthful visitor entered, doffing his cap with a courteously respectful salute that would have graced the *ancien régime*, and a quiet, searchingly anxious glance at the two priests.

He was a tall, slight lad about thirteen or fourteen, and tall for that, or perhaps the light summer ulster he wore this showery July day made him seem so—a very handsome, delicate-featured boy, dark almost as a Spaniard, with glossy, curly locks that certainly

"— To shame might
bring
The plumage of the raven's wing,"

and great dark eyes that had an odd wistfulness underlying and softening their extreme brilliance; it was a singular face, too, because it was at once so boylike and unboyish; it was bold, free, fearless as a boy's should be, softened by the tender sweetness of the sensitive mouth, as one sees sometimes in a lad of the finer

and more artistic temperament, but both the mouth in repose and the whole face were too passionate and intensely resolute to be anything but unboylike, and even almost painful in so young a lad. It struck the good vicar so, at any rate, as he scanned the picturesque face.

"Sit down, my boy," he said in his kind way that so won confidence; "you asked for me, I think—Dr. Haughton."

"Yes, sir, your advertisement for a very competent first soprano."

Again the two men looked at each other and smiled—what a voice even in speaking those few ordinary words—rich and mellowed, soft to the ear as velvet to the touch! it was music itself. It must be a singing voice of rare quality if only the training were equal to its tone and the delicate, cultivated accentuation of the words.

"Yes," said the Superior, "and you come after the vacant berth, then? What age are you? and what is your name?"

"I turned thirteen, sir, in May, and my name is Eric Dare. I haven't any references, because my father, who was a musical professor in London, taught me, and"—the bright, fearless dark eyes drooped under the long lashes, and the sensitive mouth, so quick to emotion, quivered—"he is dead; I've no one at all."

"Poor little laddie," said the vicar pityingly, glancing at the band of crape on the boy's left arm; "where then and with whom do you live?"

Eric dashed aside the glittering tears with proud, angry disdain of what he evidently thought his weakness—so early does the masculine pride of strength develop itself; the two men could have smiled, but for the pathos of the child's action and resolute settling of the lips as if firmly, desperately resolved not to give way again.

"I have just come to live with my old nurse, a widow, in the town, but she only lives by letting lodgings, and I must get some work, sir, before the little money my father left me is gone—only a few pounds it was. I will not be an expense to her, the more because she wants me to. If I were only a big enough boy, I could soon get work—I wouldn't care what. I shouldn't be less a gentleman so that I didn't loaf on a hard-working widow."

"Perfectly right, my boy. Well, we'll test your musical powers at once, and I am sure you can hardly hope to pass muster more than we do, eh, Fenwick? for we are in a fix, as I will explain presently, and badly in need of a first soprano."

The room was a spacious library, and there was a large American organ at one end. The precentor opened it and sat down, nodding to young Dare to come to his side. The vicar, a musician himself, sat still, being at a good distance for judging of the applicant's capabilities.

"Now," said Fenwick, striking the middle C, "take the *do, re, mi*, as high as you like."

Eric took the *do*, a rich, full-bodied chest note, and ran up, up, from chest to medium, from medium to head, without a break—smooth, ringing, true as a bell, every note formed and enunciated with faultless technique and respiration—up, up, G, A, B, above, touched the C true and clear, trilled like a bird on the F and G in descending, and came back to the key note of the scale in an exquisite *pianissimo* that in itself proved his careful training and simply brought down his select and critical audience as it would a larger one.

"What a voice!" exclaimed the vicar, rising quickly, "wonderful quality, and such training. It's a mezzo-soprano of very wide register. Try him with the 'Inflammatus,' Fenwick, and if he can sing *that*—well, he'll do anything; it's the most exacting scena," he said, searching through a pile of music for the "Stabat Mater"—"here it is."

"But I know it, sir," said Dare, "if you meant it for sight-reading—I've sung it so often."

"I only want it sung, my lad, that's all. Start two bars before he begins, please, Fenwick."

The precentor nodded and began.

Rossini's "Inflammatus" is perhaps one of the most exacting, as it is one of the most magnificent scenes of its style ever composed, and really requires exceptional vocal means to do full justice to its grand broad phrases, its passion, its tenderness, its pathos; it calls for these and power in the executant as well as for fine vocalization and a wide range from upper to lower register. To start a phrase on the *sol* above and on a close syllable like "In" is in itself a test of skill and voice, and both listeners watched for it anxiously. The boy took it beautifully and swept down the opening phrases to the C, giving every trill in the ascending semi-chromatic passage which follows; he was perfectly at his ease because totally unaffected and un-selfconscious, and heard now in such a song the full power of the rich organ he possessed was shown to the uttermost; it was tender, pathetic, sweet—that sweetness and pathos so peculiar and touching in the *timbre* of a boy's singing voice, and it had, too, allied to its powers a ring of passion that is very rarely perceptible or existent at all in a very young voice.

When he ceased there was perfect silence for a minute—a deeper tribute to the singer than any words of praise. Then the vicar said emphatically:

"My boy, if when you come to man's estate you keep that voice, it will be a tenor that will vest a fortune in your throat."

"Shall we try his sight-reading now?" asked Fenwick, "and that will settle the question."

"Yes, stay, I'll give you Mowbray's music—he hasn't seen that, we know."

He fetched out a book about the size of the octavo copies of

"Elijah," and, turning over the pages, placed it upon the organ desk.

"Now, Dare, see what you can make of this 'Incarnatus;' it's difficult, I warn you, and has some very odd and chromatic intervals."

"I'll do my best, sir," was the modest answer, but it was plain that he had not much fear of failing to any considerable degree.

The composer had consigned this movement to the soloist, and it certainly was difficult, but most beautiful and dramatic, so finely blending melody and harmonies that it alone bespoke a gift of a high order; the young singer's eyes sparkled as he sang—he was enjoying, revelling in its beauty; he read it with very few mistakes, and those few slight, and where the intervals were the most difficult.

"Bravo, bravo, youngster!" exclaimed his audience, and the boy's dark cheeks flushed as he glanced anxiously from one to the other.

"You'll do, Eric," said Dr. Haughton smiling. "What say you, precentor, eh?"

"Certainly," was the emphatic reply of the relieved gentleman; "but if you don't want me any more I'll be off to my district."

"Very well, I'll settle this matter—I hope satisfactorily."

"I hope so. Good-bye, Dare, for the present then."

The curate shook hands and departed, and then the vicar, after putting several questions to the boy as to his bringing up, Church principles, and so forth, which were satisfactorily answered, proceeded to briefly explain the *contretemps* which had placed them in such a musical difficulty, and how much was required of the first soprano.

"Only ten days to St. Margaret's Day, you see," said the Superior, touching the date-box on his table, which stood July 10th, "and all that soprano music—solos, part excerpts and solos and chorus—to be got up in that time; there is the entire music for the High Celebration, a *Te Deum* for matins, and an elaborate anthem for evensong, in all of which, reckoning on the fine soloist we had, my friend Mr. Mowbray has given especial prominence to the soprano. Just look carefully through the scores (it's all bound in that volume) and tell me frankly if you think you can honestly undertake the task. I'll write some letters meanwhile."

He took up his pen; young Dare took the music on his knee and turned it slowly over. For full twenty minutes there was silence, and then the lad quietly shut the book. Father Haughton looked up.

"Well," he said, "what say you to it?"

"I can do it, sir."

Said so quietly without any asseveration—only that resolute self-reliance again, so unboylike, so carrying conviction of his capability.

"You speak very positive, little lad," the priest could not help

saying, kindly but with a mild implication of reproof; "you might fail."

The blood sprang to the boy's cheeks.

"I beg your pardon, sir—but I shall not fail. I don't want you to pay one penny till the festival is over, because if I do fail I shall not have earned it."

"I won't be hard about that; if you do your best to study the work you are entitled to some remuneration, especially as I want a soloist as long as your voice lasts. You would live in the Choir College, boarded, lodged, educated free, and have £15 a year besides; and for this present exigency I will myself give you a fee of ten guineas, after the 20th."

Eric Dare's face fell, and he shook his curly head, setting his teeth for a moment the vicar fancied.

"Please, Dr. Haughton, don't be angry with me, but I couldn't go to the College; I couldn't leave Nurse Mary; I promised not, and I can help her a great deal in so many ways. I must stop with her at present anyhow, and besides——" he stopped, determinately mastering the evident bitter grief that should have been foreign to such a mere boy—"if I lived there the other boys wouldn't like me; I should make them miserable, and they would me. I—I couldn't bear it, sir; I should make a fool of myself when they laughed and played or talked of home; they've all got parents and homes, some one who cares for them; and I have just lost everything, sir."

"Poor child, my poor child," said the vicar, laying his hand on the drooping, sorrowful head, "have you no friends at all?"

"None. Father had a long illness and we got poor and friendless," was the answer, with a sarcasm all the more bitter because of its *naïveté*; "if you would pay me a little, sir, I could manage, and if I failed in anything you could sack me at once."

The Superior leaned back in his chair and thought a minute. He was deeply touched now and interested in this singular little being; have him he must, too. "I'll do this then instead, Eric," he said after thinking a few minutes, "the fee shall stand as I said, and I will pay you a guinea a week as long as you are our first soprano, so that you can live with your old nurse."

Oh, the flash of light that broke over the boy's handsome face, he could not speak at first for gladness and gratitude, and Father Haughton added, smiling:

"You can take the music with you and look it through to-day, then, if the matter is settled."

"Yes, yes; oh, how kind of you to give me work," Eric cried out impetuously; "I'll take it; there is a piano in Mary's parlour and I'll get on fine by to-morrow."

"Very good, my boy. Come here at ten and we will have your first rehearsal with the choir in here, and others during the week. Where does Mrs. ——, your nurse, live?"

"At 15, Orange Street, sir, only half a mile or so off."

"I know it;" he rose and gave Dare the music. "Good-bye, my child, till to-morrow. You are fairly now installed, then, as the first soprano of St. Margaret's."

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST SOPRANO AMONGST THE CHOIR.

LIKE wildfire the good news spread throughout the precincts of the church and the parish that "Father Charles" had found a first soprano in place of the boy whose disobedience in visiting the forbidden smallpox-stricken house had resulted so dangerously to himself, and so nearly fatally to the musical arrangements for the Dedication Festival of St. Margaret's. Great, therefore, was the rejoicing, and the boys in the Choir College were wild to see and hear and question their new leader. I fancy that that afternoon at lessons the master had to be like unto the gods of the heathen—deaf, to many an eager whisper in class; blind, to many an irrepressible little ebullition of excitement, which found vent in a burst of tongues and endless surmises the moment they were turned out into the big playground, with the announcement of a rehearsal at ten next morning with the new boy—a reflex in their very small way of the great world without. Conjectures amongst these little people did not in the least flag because no one could answer conjectures.

"What was the chap's name? Who was his father? Where did he come from—church or cathedral? What was he like? How old was he? Whose room would he be in, and what class?" and so forth.

"Oh, bother the fellow!" exclaimed a big grown boy of twelve who led the chorus *soprani*, and conceitedly thought himself more than entitled to, and capable of filling, the vacant post. "He'll be beastly conceited and uppish, I know, but I won't stand his airs, I promise him—not I, or my name ain't Godfrey."

"Better wait till you're axed it," said the first alto, a jolly, saucy little fellow, about the same age, though smaller. "Guess he won't stand *your* airs, if he's got the spirit of a mouse."

Godfrey made a flying blow, but the other threw a somersault and danced off laughing, with both naughty little hands extended in that elegant position which schoolboys call "making a long nose." Boys will be boys, whether gentle or simple.

The next day, however, their curiosity was at any rate partly satisfied, for when they were all assembled for rehearsal in their own immense class-room (containing both piano, American organ, and row of music desks, ranged like the choir), Dr. Haughton came in with the new acquisition, the precentor, the organist and

several men of the choir—amongst them the tenor soloist. The Superior introduced Eric to the other lads in a characteristic way.

"Boys, this is our new first soprano, and I hope you'll all be the best of friends. His name is Eric Dare; he has no parents, and he will not live here at all, but be with a friend in Malverton. Now, to your places," and he turned aside to the organist.

Some had exchanged friendly nods and smiles with the stranger, some had come forward and shaken hands cordially, and amongst these was friendly little Beverly, the first alto.

"I'm awfully glad you've come," he said. "You and I have got some stunning duets, you know."

"Ah, then you are the alto soloist," said the other's velvet tones. "I'm glad of that."

"Now, boys, ready," cried the precentor, rapping on his desk, and as the organist struck a few preliminary chords, Beverly whispered to his next neighbour:

"That dark chap won't take any nonsense from Godfrey, I'll bet; he's a whipper-snapper, but he looks so awfully gritty."

The other chorister nodded, grinned and whispered back—irreverent young monkey:

"Yes, 'the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,' " which reply nearly made poor Beverly laugh.

"One word before we start," said the precentor; "remember, Dare, that you are not required to sing at all in any of the chorus parts of either the mass, canticles or anthems."

"So I supposed, sir; thank you."

Then the rehearsal began in good earnest with the introit to the Celebration music, which opened with a melodious quartet in strict canon form and passed into full chorus at the "Gloria." The choir of course were all but perfect in the whole of the music, for it had been in hand many weeks and but for the collapse of the late soloist only a couple of full rehearsals in church with both organ and band would have been requisite.

As it was, however, the precentor very wisely spared his voices as much as possible, and only went through those numbers which were absolutely necessary as being connected with the new soloist's work. The rehearsal lasted two hours, and when it was over the general admiration and satisfaction about the new first soprano was freely expressed by the choir, the boys especially; the men present were naturally less exuberant openly, but the tenor soloist whispered enthusiastically to Dr. Haughton, whilst the lads were eagerly clustering round Eric Dare.

"What an exquisite voice it is! such a handsome face, too, and a singular one."

"Yes," said the vicar with a half sigh. "I wish it were a little more commonplace for his own sake, poor lad; he'll need an extremely firm and judicious hand—strong but very tender, or—well, he may be led but never driven."

"No," returned the other, still intently watching the boy across the room—"sensitive, proud, passionate—it's in his face; if he takes the wrong way he'll go to the devil! Ah! I beg pardon, doctor."

The vicar smiled, shook his head a little, and they joined the other men round the organist, who then suggested that the next day Dare should come to him in the library at the Clergy House and have a "regular drumming practice" of all he had to do, which was arranged, and then the boys were packed off to the playground, the men departed, and Eric Dare left with the Superior, parting from him at the Clergy House door, next to the College save for the garden space between. Haughton stood watching the young lithe figure striding away with free elastic step and graceful movement, and as it disappeared round the corner of the churchyard he turned with a start to see the precentor almost at his elbow, having evidently also paused to gaze after the new chorister.

"Um," said Fenwick slowly, "if I'm not very much mistaken you and I are thinking exactly the same thing."

"Aye—not for the first time, Fenwick. What is it?"

"Simply, between ourselves—I should be very sorry to take my davey that that boy has *not* run away from home."

"So should I, decidedly," returned Haughton emphatically, "and I shall keep an eye to the papers."

"Oh, oh!" cried the precentor, laughing, "not till after our festival, please, then, vicar—not till after our festival."

Father Charles laughed too, and put his latch-key into the door.

"Do you know," said he, with a twinkle in his bright grey eyes, "what some of the wicked young fry irreverently, but I fear very aptly, call you? I overheard it the other day."

"No—what? a nickname—Daddy Fen—that, of course. What else?"

"Why, 'Mr. Worldly-wiseman.'"

The precentor laughed so much that he was fain to lean against the stone pillar of the portico, and the vicar laughed nearly as much as they entered the house. What a delicious thing is a good hearty laugh, to be sure; you never hear it from a base or sinister nature. But the days went by, and the practices went steadily on, and there was no advertisement of any sort about absconding or lost people. As to the boys they never saw the soprano at all in those ten days, save at the two full rehearsals in the church, on the Saturday and Monday nights before St. Margaret's Day—which fell on the Wednesday that year. Tuesday the voices were rested, of course.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGER WHO SWOONED AT EVENSONG.

"I SHALL not fail, sir"—the new first soprano had said with the quiet confidence of certainty, and he did not in any one point; he was in splendid voice, and heart and soul were in the music and the solemn services, the impressiveness of which was aided by the very building itself, for St. Margaret's was an immense and handsome church of almost cathedral-like proportions and exceptionally fine acoustic qualities, which gave the fullest advantage to the combined effects of voices, organ, and band; the waves of sound swept upwards as one hears in St. Paul's Cathedral, and the rich thrilling tones of that boy's solo voice seemed to vault and swell, filling the whole building with its melody. The congregation, as it poured out after the High Celebration, naturally made it a theme to talk about, amongst others, and those favoured ones who were present at the luncheon warmly complimented the vicar on the acquisition he had to the superb choir and the musical *répertoire*, in the new soprano and Mowbray's new music. Who was this gifted handsome boy, and why was not the composer present to hear him and his own exquisite music? &c., &c., to which Father Haughton merely replied that Dare was an orphan, the son of a London musical professor, and had answered his advertisement. Mr. Mowbray had unfortunately been detained by illness, but would probably be present next Sunday, which being in the octave the same festival services would as usual be repeated. Evensong was, if possible, even more crowded than the morning, since more men were freed from business, but during the service a slight disturbance took place at the bottom of the church, where a number of strangers—perhaps chance passers-by—had strayed in and got standing room near the west door. The anthem, as has been said, was very beautiful and elaborate, and necessarily longer than usual; it opened with a noble fugal chorus which presently passed into a stately chorale for the four leading voices, which led by an instrumental interlude into the duet for soprano and alto that little Beverly had spoken of, and which presently became a trio with the tenor, whose solo followed, giving the leading soloist a needful rest—a short one, though, for the tenor's last note was the first of the soprano solo, the octave above with a *point d'orgue* just supported by the quiver of the violin as they changed the key by progressions into the relative minors. The boy took up the note with such perfect lead—so exquisitely *pianissimo* yet penetrating—that it seemed to grow out of the other—held it, swelling the note, trilled a second like a veritable blackbird, and lifting to the B flat swept into the full melody, the rich flexible voice seeming literally to leap from note to note as if it disdained the difficulties

set it by the composer's bold hand. This led into the finale, a magnificent soprano solo and chorus, the latter quite *mezzo-voce* at first, till, returning to the theme of the chorale, the anthem closed with the full power of the entire voices and instruments.

In a secular building there would have been an absolute storm of applause, and even as it was there was an indescribable and irresistible mental rather than physical respiration that went throughout the concourse as if it felt itself let down to earth again, after a glimpse into Paradise—a hush that could be felt—and then silently the people knelt for the prayers that follow.

It was exactly at that moment the sad little disturbance occurred—a deep heavy groan, as of mortal throes, and a gentleman who had been standing behind the last row of chairs on the men's side fell heavily to the pavement in a dead swoon—a man whom the churchwarden at that end had noticed come in at the very commencement of the anthem—and mentally noted that, though handsome, the stranger looked terribly haggard and ill. There was no confusion, no fuss, though of course most heads went round—the people about fell back as the churchwarden, a powerful man over six feet, strode between them; half a dozen men as instantly and nearly noiselessly came from their seats, one of them a doctor—and quickly as quietly the fallen man was lifted and borne out of the church and across to a coffee tavern hard by, long since started by the vicar, and which was also the working men's club attached to St. Margaret's.

In a few minutes the gentlemen who had assisted came back—then presently the churchwarden, looking very grave, and knelt down in his place, answering a question from the man next him by a shake of the head, and whispered :

“Better? no—advanced heart disease. Mayne fears.”

“Ah, poor fellow—hope not.”

But Dr. Mayne never came back to the church at all, which fact did not escape the keen notice of the vicar—very few things did.

It was quite an hour before the entire service, including the recessional, was over, and priests and choir had filed out of the chancel and so back to the large vestry.

Just as the vicar following last entered, a man, the master in charge of the coffee tavern, came hurriedly along the passage leading to the outer entrance, and put a note into Dr. Haughton's hand.

“From Dr. Mayne, sir,” he whispered, but the quick ear of the first soprano, who was near, heard him; “the gentleman is dying.”

Haughton threw off his stole and surplice, and read the note; it was telegraphic: “Patient dying. Asks for a priest. Come directly,—F. Mayne.”

“I'll be across in a minute, Brown,” said the Superior, and turned to give his senior curate some direction, then followed the man so quickly that they reached the open door of the club together.

They had laid the unfortunate man at the first in a private room, and just on the threshold Dr. Mayne met the priest.

"There is no hope," he said in a low voice. "I'll explain more later; heart disease at that terrible stage when the least shock or excitement may bring on a fatal attack as this is; some concussion too—struck the head; memory and speech are partially affected, but there is something on his mind."

"Poor soul, he knows then?"

"I told him—you know I always do. I will await you here though all human aid is past."

"But not God's, we hope," said the priest, and passed softly within the room, closing the door behind him.

There on the big old-fashioned sofa lay the stricken man, each slow laboured breath painful to hear; the lips were livid, the features drawn, the face ghastly in its horror and fear—scarce thirty in years, but awful in the miserable story written in every line, in the wild haggard eyes—

"Old with excess, and passion, and pain,"

maddened, tortured with remorse and dread, but it seemed too mentally and physically crushed, perhaps too morally sunk, to do more (if so much even) as vaguely grasp at some dim idea of penitence and restitution. Deeply moved, the vicar sat down beside him, and stooping spoke a few gentle words of loving kindness, the Divine message of mercy to the penitent sinner, that seemed to partially reach the half-wandering brain—the upward glaring eyes softened a little, the livid lips moved, words came in rapid gasps on each breath, so inarticulate sometimes, so incoherent and disjointed that the listener could scarcely understand them.

"It was murder—yes—it was—don't touch that hand; it's red—red, I tell you—with murder—*murder*, and, my God! I've heard its ghost—heard—its—ghost—out of the past—out of the foaming horrible waters! I drowned it—and it's crying after me, I say, to-night—no, long ago—oh, that shrieking mad gale—that crashing bridge that sent them all to death!" he almost shrieked, and Father Houghton laid his soft soothing hand on the poor damp brow.

"Hush," he said gently, "listen to me and try to tell me more quietly whatever troubles you, that I—God's priest—may help you to make your peace with Him."

A moment's pause—then:

"And you will be silent as the grave?"

"Yes, my son. If as man to man I am honour bound; if as penitent to priest, the seal of confession is sacred, you know."

The dying man gazed fixedly into that grand fine face, evidently struggling painfully to recall memory more fully than was possible now.

"I know," came again with increasing physical effort, but more

mental calm and coherence, "but remember"—a pause to breathe—"if ever—you can do good—with it—*break that seal*. Oh, God! my head! Who were they—the names are lost—lost! I cannot die."

The dying man fell back, but once more the vicar gradually calmed him a little, and then at last—slowly—brokenly—with pitiable lapse of memory for any names or places, or dates—came the miserable agonized confession of terrible sin, of deep wrong done, of mad remorse vainly seeking to drown itself in madder excesses—a grim record—alas! only too old in the scroll of human lives and human souls.

Presently the door softly opened and the priest stood on the threshold.

"Come in," he said. "God rest his soul."

The two physicians passed together to the dead man's side.

* * * * *

The man Brown told them when they came out that he had seen the gentleman who lay dead, riding that morning with Mr. Fermoy, of Malverton Park, two miles out of the town, and he thought he was one of the guests staying there. The vicar at once wrote a note and sent him mounted over to the Park.

Mr. Fermoy came back with the messenger, and early the following morning had the dead man removed to Malverton Park.

Dr. Mayne gave a certificate of death from acute heart disease, and then as far as he knew the matter of the stranger's almost tragic death ended, and as far as the present went it ended for the vicar too. He knew the dead man's name and his grim secret, but in the latter the keynote was wanting that would have enabled the priest to—possibly—carry out the dying man's agonized prayer—to make such restitution as could be to those now, alas, unknown ones he had sinned against and wronged.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT THE VICAR SAW IN THE PLAYGROUND.

ERIC DARE had more than redeemed his words, "I shall not fail," and fully earned his right to be retained in his position and live by his voice. The Superior presented him with the ten guineas he had promised, and confirmed the arrangement for his retention as first soprano, and after the octave of St. Margaret's Day was over, matters fell quietly back into their usual routine. But if the other boys had hoped that Dare's reserve would give way in time they were mistaken; the singular little stranger remained a stranger; always courteous, pleasant, obliging, but beyond such companionship as duty made a necessity he did not mix with them, except

sometimes he would join them in their gymnastic exercises, rousing admiring wonder at his extreme suppleness and agility; sometimes, too, he would on half-holiday go out with them to the beach below the cliffs, and there he climbed like a catamount and was so daringly bold that more than once the master or curate with the party would in alarm call him to order. These and an incident in the playground one day, which Dr. Haughton himself chanced unseen to witness, made them totally alter a suspicion which Godfrey had started that "the confounded young ass was a white-feather, look what he might."

Godfrey was on this occasion teasing and then bullying a very small boy; the first soprano called out to him with certainly imperious command to leave off or he would make him.

"You daren't come near me," Godfrey retorted sneeringly; "you're afraid, you scamp."

The other came up instantly.

"Let little Mayne go, do you hear?"

"Pouf! don't brag, you cowardly young whelp."

The boys were all now looking on, but almost before the last word passed Godfrey's lips the other turned upon him with fierce passion and struck him full in the face with his open hand.

Smarting under the contemptuous indignity as well as the pain, Godfrey aimed a blindly furious blow in return, but his taller, far slighter adversary agilely swerved aside, caught the upraised arm, and in an instant, with the supple deftness of an accomplished wrestler, scientifically tripped up the bully and threw him sprawling to the ground.

"Whew—but that was prettily done," muttered the vicar laughing, the old Adam awakening—"but it's time to stop it—young rascals."

So whilst the boys burst into a shout of applause out strode Father Charles just as the fallen one picked himself up, crestfallen but glaring at the other, who stood on the defensive still, with flashing eyes and the delicate hands clenched, quite ready for an attack, not the least abashed by the appearance on the scene of even the Superior; not a bit—he stood his ground.

"For shame, you two lads," said the vicar, looking from one to the other with grave rebuke, though he felt the corners of his lips twitch, "quarrelling—and blows between my children! Is that either gentlemanly or Christian, think you?"

Sullen silence from Godfrey, but the other's fiery spirit was still at blood-heat and he answered boldly though respectfully:

"No, father, but stopping injustice is both, and I can't stand by and see a big fellow bullying a little one, and as Godfrey is twice my bulk, I was forced to use my skill against his brute strength. I should only have thrown him to stop him if he had held his tongue, but when he called me coward and dared me to touch him of course I struck him."

"It's not true, sir," broke in Godfrey, "I wasn't bullying—only playing, and Dare meddled, so I—"

"Hush, no falsehood," interrupted the vicar now very sternly. "I was at the class-room window and saw the whole thing; you were worrying and bullying Mayne in a manner a big boy (or any boy) ought to be ashamed of, and in another minute I should have called to you myself and punished you. I will *not* permit bullying, understand, and though Dare might, nay should, have spoken more gently, less imperiously, he was right to stop you. Another time, Eric, try gentle measures and curb your fiery temper; you roused antagonism, both lost temper and of course a quarrel ensued. Shake hands, children, and never let me hear the same again."

Free, generous as passionate, Eric's pretty lissome hand was offered at once—Godfrey's more sullenly. He was a good enough lad on the whole, but quite of commoner clay—the kind of nature that is all the better for a regular knock-down. From that day he respected the reserved whipper-snapper first soprano simply because he feared him.

"He's a perfect young devil," he said one day to a chum.

The chum grinned.

The fame of the first soprano of the well-known St. Margaret's Church, Malverton, spread all over those parts and indeed further as weeks and months went by, and was even alluded to more than once in Church papers and musical papers, and oftentimes strangers from a distance would come over to St. Margaret's to hear the far-famed soloist.

So passed the Autumn, Christmas, then the New Year—that never-to-be-forgotten January of '81—then Lent and the glorious Easter-tide.

"They say, dear," said Eric's nurse, Mrs. Granger, just as he was starting for evensong on Low Sunday, "that there's been an accident to a goods train near the station that's ploughed up or blocked the line awful, and the down train from London will be detained for hours."

"I daresay only an hour or two, nurse. Good-bye. I'll run home as quick as I can after evensong is over, but it will be late, because we do Mowbray's St. Margaret's anthem, you know, and that is long."

He kissed the good woman fondly and went off at a good pace. Mary Granger sighed heavily as she shut the door.

(To be concluded.)

A LONG FAREWELL.

GOOD-BYE ! Good-bye ! The anchor's weighed ;
For thee I leave dear England's shore,
Relinquish every wish and hope,
Leave home and joy for evermore.

Good-bye ! Good-bye ! Thou'lt never know
What anguish reigns within my heart ;
What fierce rebellion rages there,
To think we now for ever part.

Good-bye ! Good-bye ! I would not stay
To see thee shed one bitter tear,
Or breathe one sigh in vain regret
For love of me, were I still near.

Good-bye ! Good-bye ! The anchor's weighed.
A long farewell to home and thee.
Yet, should'st thou breathe *one* tender sigh,
Oh ! waft it, love, across the sea.

JOSEPHINE ERROL.

"THE CHANGES OF AN HOUR."

By NORA VYNNE,

AUTHOR OF "A WIFE AND A FRIEND," "LADY ATHERTON'S SACHET," "MR. JENKEN'S BARGAIN," "AN UNNOTICED INCIDENT," "THE BLIND ARTIST'S PICTURES," "OVERSTRAINED HONOUR," "THE GIRL WHO WANTED TO BE MARRIED," ETC., ETC.

THE tide had turned and the sea was making a white line along the yellow sand far down the shore. Higher up, almost close to the cliffs, a man was seated on an arm of one of the many little groups of rocks that lay scattered all along the shore.

He was whistling a slow tune and his eyes were fixed on the figure of a girl, whose white gown kept appearing and vanishing as she threaded her way among the dark rocks.

The tune grew slower and slower as the girl neared the spot where the man sat and stopped altogether when she came within hearing distance. He rose and waited for her to come close.

She looked up with a smile, and was about to speak some pleasant greeting, but something in his manner silenced her and she stood looking at him questioningly—almost in fear, it seemed.

"I knew you would come this way," he said, "so I waited here to speak to you."

"Yes? What did you want to say?"

"I think you can guess."

"I am not clever at guessing; I must trouble you to speak."

"Then you must forgive me if what I say pains you. I assure you I don't find mine a pleasant task, but I have no choice. When I came home last night I found you the guest of my mother, and I heard from her that you are engaged to my friend Harry Lepel; this surprised me, for we had met before—Miss Maron."

There was a marked accent on the title and name, and the girl looked up defiantly, answering that rather than his words.

"Well, Madame Vechamp if you prefer it. What then?"

He looked relieved at the admission; it made his work easier for him.

"Simply this, Madame Vechamp; I cannot allow your intended marriage with my friend to take place."

As spoke a man who, unseen by either him or her, had come down the cliffs by a footpath, and was winding slowly through the

rocks towards them, stopped short, as if the words he had heard had deprived him of all power to speak or move.

"I do not see what right you have to forbid it," said the girl haughtily, "nor what reason."

"The right of friendship, and as for reason, your memory, if it is half as good as mine, will show you reason enough."

"My memory tells me of nothing which need part me from my lover."

"Oh, Madame, think again. You cannot have forgotten the house in the Rue Chartois."

"I have not, nor the wretched years I passed there. That was a miserable time, why recall it now it is past?"

"Because I knew you there as the wife of a gambler, Louis Vechamp."

"I was his wife—that was my misfortune, not my fault. Married when almost a child, by a careless and indifferent father to a man like Louis Vechamp, was I to blame that he used my face and voice to decoy fools to his gambling-house? was I to blame for his wickedness—I, his most helpless victim? who hated and despised him."

"You gave no sign of disliking your life there, so far as I can recollect."

"Because I dared not, or if I had dared, could I have thrown myself on the compassion of such men as frequented Louis Vechamp's house? Foolish boys or hardened sharpers."

"You showed some favour to one or two of them, however."

"To yourself, you mean. True, I did. You were the first man who came to the house who seemed like a gentleman, so I foolishly tried to interest you, in the hope that you would help me to escape from my tyrant."

"Ah, it is fortunate for me, perhaps, that I was too stupid or too inexperienced to understand your meaning; I supposed that you merely wished to encourage my visits to your husband's house. Well, Charlie Vane understood you better than I."

"He did indeed."

"And you found him more accommodating, poor fool."

"He was noble, and generous and kind," she cried, "and I will not have him spoken of but with respect."

"We need not speak of him at all," said Dallas coldly, "we have said enough. You must see, Madame Vechamp, that it is useless for you to think of becoming my friend's wife."

"But why? Since we love each other?"

Dallas looked at her in amaze.

"But, Madame—you said Louis Vechamp was your husband?"

"Of course, but he died three years ago. He is dead and my old life is dead with him, dead and past."

"Madame Vechamp," said Dallas coldly and gravely, "nothing is ever past, nothing that we do dies out with the dead years. We

cannot leave the follies and sins of our youth behind us as we go forward, it is a mistake to suppose so; we must bear them with us to the very grave. I am sorry for you, deeply sorry, but your past stands—an invincible barrier between you and Harry Lepel."

The stern sorrow of his tone frightened her; for the first time she seemed to realize the depth of his blame, if not to understand it. There was as much astonishment as grief in her voice when she spoke again.

"Is it so bad as that?" she cried. "Ah, do not say so—do not say so, I did not think it was so bad as that. I know I am not a fit wife for him—his wife should have no dark past to forget; his wife should be young, light-hearted, well born. I am none of these, I know, but I love him so—I who have never loved before or been loved. I loved him and I was so happy, happy for the first time. Do you know, from my earliest childhood until the day I met Harry, I have never known what it was to be happy—never seen the sun rise and been glad that I lived. Do you not pity me?"

There was a world of pathos in her eyes and voice as she ceased speaking, but Dallas answered almost impatiently:

"However much I may pity you, Madame Vechamp, I will not stand quietly by and allow you to deceive my friend."

"But why should you judge me so hardly?" she cried. "I have been terribly unfortunate, but really not much to blame. I had not ever had a chance to be good—I was so young, so ignorant when I was driven into that hateful marriage, and my life with Louis Vechamp was breaking my heart. It was surely no great wrong to desert a husband such as he was. Why, he was forcing me to help him in his wicked schemes; I chose the least of two evils when I left him."

She paused, but Dallas did not answer her, so after a moment she went on, more quietly this time.

"Charlie Vane—noble, kind-hearted Charlie Vane—procured me the post of librarian here in Saltport, and I have lived up there on the hill for four years, safely if drearily; I have been alone, with no friends and no hopes, but I breathed the pure sea air, I lived among sweet country scenes, I read great and noble books until I seemed to myself to be created afresh. All the taint of my early training, all the faults of my youth and ignorance seemed to die out of my memory, out of my nature even. Am I the woman you knew in the Rue Chartois? I do not think that I am."

She ended quietly, and almost proudly; some signs of sympathy began to show in Dallas' face, but his resolution was unshaken. The man behind the rocks still stood, hearing all; not that he listened wilfully, but the words he had heard were of such terrible import to him that he was stunned out of all power to choose what he would do. He simply stood where he had been struck, and

heard because he could not help hearing; if the two others had moved away, he would not have followed them, if they had come towards him he would not have drawn back.

The girl went on speaking.

"And then, after all these years, when I was ready for him and not before, Harry came, and we loved each other. He loved me and the whole world was changed to me. My life had been all patience before, now it was all delight. He told his friend, your mother, of me, and she became my friend too; she took me to her house, her home. Think what a change it was for me to have a home and friends. Think of it, you who have had these pleasant things all your life."

"I might ask you if you did not act most unfairly by my mother in withholding your past from her, only it will be enough if we speak of your conduct to Harry Lepel."

"In withholding it from him? Well, you blame me justly, there I was wrong. You have never done wrong, of course. Why should you? You could always have all you wanted without, and more—had not you always from your childhood loving friends to guide you right? Whom had I ever to teach me truth and uprightness?"

She was speaking very bitterly now; he did not answer, and after a moment she went on:

"If he had ever questioned me, I think I should have told him the truth, but unasked why should I condemn myself? I so feared to lose him. I knew I could not live without him—he was my life, my new and better life. . . . Try to realize this; try to see it as I do. Why should we be parted when we love each other? Don't think of the gambler's tool—of the wife who deserted her husband, think that this is my one chance in life. Think of all those dreary years I have passed—seven years without hope—seven years of famine; and now my time of plenty has come you would send me away desolate. Now when I seem to stand at the very gate of heaven, you would shut it in my face. You don't know how well we love each other, and it is so sweet—so wonderfully sweet—to love and be loved. Ah, do not be cruel! have pity on me—on us both. Why should you make yourself the judge to doom our happiness? I will be a true, true wife to Harry. I will make him so happy. Will nothing move you? Is all I can say vain? Ah! I see it is talking a strange language to speak of love to one who has never loved. There is no hope for us—oh! Harry, Harry, Harry!"

At the sound of his name a troubled look came over the face of the man who listened.

"He must not be cruel to her," he murmured; "I shall have to interfere if he is cruel to her."

But Dallas was not going to be more cruel than he could help, for he was touched at last—deeply touched—his voice showed it.

"Miss Maron!" he cried, "what can I do? Harry Lepel is my friend."

"Keep silence."

"I must not—I cannot. No, hear me—I am not heartless—I feel for you more deeply than you think; but my duty is clear before me—I have no choice but to save my friend. I know what is often said—that few men have a right to look too closely into the past lives of the women they marry, but it is not so with Harry Lepel. He has the right to insist that his wife's life shall be spotless—absolutely without flaw."

"Do you suppose I ever thought otherwise?" she cried indignantly. "Do you think I don't know that he is the noblest, the best man on the face of the earth?"

"And knowing—believing this, you would condemn him to perpetual danger?"

"What danger?"

"Discovery. If you were to marry Harry, and afterwards he were to find this out from yourself or from any of your old acquaintances, it would overwhelm him—crush him utterly. He would never hold up his head again. His life would be ruined."

"How could he find it out? Or who that knew me in Paris would find me here?"

"There would always be the danger—but that is not the question. I was only for one moment supposing that it might have been possible for me to allow this marriage to go on, but he being the man he is, it is impossible."

The sympathy had died out of his voice, his face was hard and resolute now; and she, seeing how vain was all pleading, spoke no more, but stood silent, waiting to hear her sentence.

"I have no choice but to tell Harry all I know; I will deal with you as gently as I can, but I must do my duty by my friend."

"Ah, yes, I suppose you are right," she said bitterly; "but how one hates such cold merciless right. If God deals with you as you have dealt with me, *justly*, how will you fare? Well, well, words are no use. . . . You said you would be gentle with me?"

"As gentle as I can."

"Then do not tell him now—not quite at once I mean. Let me see him once more before you part us for ever. I promise I will not speak of this—not set my story against yours or make him promise not to listen to what you say. No, no, I could do that, but I will not; I will only see him for one moment, only kiss him once without speaking. Will you have so much mercy? Will you let me do this?"

The quiet intensity of her tone showed how earnestly she desired the favour and how hard it was to ask it. The man behind the rocks bent forward eagerly, murmuring stupidly, as if the matter concerned some stranger:

"He ought to let her do that, he ought to grant her so much."

"Yes," said Dallas, "I will trust you so far."

"I am going on to Saltport now," she said, "going on an errand of charity for your mother; I am taking some medicine to a dying woman. Ah! dear God, how I wish I were going to change places with her. Poor woman, I ought not to have waited so long; it was selfish of me, for your mother was so anxious that the poor woman should have the medicine—'It can't help her,' she said, 'but it will please the poor creature to have it.' She is a good woman, your mother, Mr. Dallas, good to every one, and you can't understand what she has been to me—how kind and sweet and motherlike—at least, what I have dreamt a mother would be like, for I never had one. Do you know, I think that if your mother had been my judge I should have been judged more gently. If I could hope any more I should almost hope that your mother will be sorry for me."

"Miss Maron, why lengthen a discussion so painful to both of us? I am waiting to hear what it is you wish to do."

"I beg your pardon, I will tell you. I will go my errand, and when I come back it will be dusk. I will wait for Harry in a nook in the hall, where I often wait for him when he comes home in the evening. It will be dark in the hall, so he will not see my face, and I will kiss him once, and say no word, and then I will leave him and pass away out of his life for ever. You shall none of you ever hear of me again."

"Miss Maron, one word more—pray do not be offended, but if you have no friends but those you leave behind, what will become of you? You cannot go back to the library at Saltport. You must let me help you, at least until you find suitable work. I daresay you hate me, but some one must help you, and I am sure you would rather it was I than Lepel. Let me at least——"

He stopped short, startled by the anger and scorn in her face—a terrible, but not an evil look—one would almost have said it was just anger—deserved scorn.

"Hate you?" she said under her breath, "hate you? I had cause enough without this last insult. If you only knew how I hate you."

Then she passed by him and walked quickly away down the shore, her white gown appearing and disappearing in flashes as she wound her way among the rocks, until at last, turning a corner of the cliffs, she was lost to sight.

The man who had been standing behind the rocks all this time came forward slowly.

Dallas, who had been watching the girl disappear, turned towards the sea again and began to whistle the same mournful tune that had been on his lips before—very slowly indeed this time. The other man stopped short.

"Whistling," he muttered; "he is my friend, he means well by me, but he is going to tell me—at least, he thinks he is going to tell me—what will break my heart, and yet he can sit there and whistle."

Harry Lepel stood looking resentfully at his friend for some moments, then he turned and went away without speaking.

Dallas finished that tune and another—many more—as he sat on the rocks, resolute but miserable, satisfied that what he intended to do was right, but wishing with all his heart it had fallen to the lot of some one else to do it.

The tide was coming in fast now, and the thoughtless white waves leaped higher and higher up the shore; the sun was dropping slowly down into the mists that rose from the sea to meet it. The evening had turned cold already, and a low wind began to creep in and out among the rocks.

Dallas rose and tried to shake off a feeling of discomfort that seemed very like remorse.

"I know I was right," he said to himself, "I know I was right, only somehow she looked and spoke so much as if she had been in the right."

He stood watching the darkening waves a little longer, then looking at his watch he saw it was growing late, and remembering that Miss Maron would soon come back along the shore on her way home, he turned slowly away.

"She won't want to see me again, poor child," he said to himself; "I will go home and keep out of sight. Poor woman, I wonder what she will do when she leaves."

He began to make his way home, climbing over the slippery rocks. The whispering of the wind seemed like a reproach in his ears; the cry of the sea-birds startled him, it was so like a human voice—a heartbroken human voice.

"I have done right," he repeated, "there can be no doubt of it. I have done right."

And yet he felt strangely distressed; he saw still the scorn and anger in the woman's eyes, and it seemed almost unmanly to have raised such feelings in the heart of any one so helpless.

What was that? Nothing but a louder, wilder cry from a sea-bird; but Dallas, starting, missed his footing on the slippery rocks and fell.

Only a trifling fall it would have seemed to an onlooker, yet Dallas did not rise again. He had struck his head on a hard corner of rock, and he lay there on his face, stunned, with the tide coming fast up the sands towards him.

The moments passed. A mile away in Saltport, Sara Maron had done her errand, and was coming slowly home along the shore. Coming home for the last time; to-morrow she would have no home.

The sun had almost set, the dusk was gathering, but the waves

were still all purple and gold as they danced and leaped towards the man lying motionless on the sand. Nearer and nearer came the white figure of the girl, moving slowly, listless and weary with despair. Nearer and nearer leaped the careless white waves, singing and laughing to each other. Which would reach him first?

The girl was quite close now, but she saw nothing, for her eyes were heavy and aching with unshed tears—with tears she must not shed yet, because of that one moment's grace that had been granted her. Ah, well, there would be time enough for weeping. Time enough? Aye; all her life.

The waves rushed up towards the motionless figure, leaving their long wreaths of wet foam behind them as they shrank back whispering to each other of what they had seen. One, bolder than the rest, splashed his face, but did not rouse him.

The girl quickened her pace; she hurried on through the gathering dusk, for she saw, not the sea nor the sands, nor the shadowy coast-line, but that dim nook where she would wait for her lover to-night. She saw herself waiting for him as we see ourselves in dreams, and she saw him come. It was dark in the hall already, but she could see her lover's face and the love in his eyes as their hands met. A deep tearless sob broke from her white lips.

What was that? She had stumbled against something, and, looking down involuntarily, she saw the man who had ruined all her hopes lying helpless at her feet.

Mechanically she turned his face to the fading light and saw what had happened. There was a deep bruise on his temple and a faint streak of blood across his cheek.

She stood looking on the face that had been cold and hard to her pleading, the closed eyes where she had looked for mercy in vain, the lips that had sentenced her without pity. What wonder if the tempter's voice spoke loudly in her heart:

"He is my enemy, and if he dies I shall be safe."

A noisy wave rushed up, splashing her skirts. She drew back, shuddering.

"Who can blame me? It is no act of mine. If I had gone back some other way, or had but walked a step or so nearer to the cliffs, he would have died, and my secret would have been safe. What shall I do?"

The helpless form appealed to her; another wave raised one hand and flung it towards her as if in a gesture of entreaty, but the tempter still spoke in her heart:

"He was cruel to me, why should I show mercy on him? I will not save him, to my own undoing."

But she did not move. The red sun, stooping through the mists, touched the dim line of the horizon, the dusk deepened, and the light began to die out of the waves as they hid the face of the man she had such cause to hate.

Then with a sudden cry the girl stooped down.

"Ah, my God, help me!" she cried; "help me to do right. I will do right. I will not be a murderess, come what may."

She flung her arms round the helpless figure and dragged it a foot or two along the sand. Only a foot or two; she took breath and tried again; better luck this time, there was a good distance between him and the waves now. Once more she strained every muscle as she dragged him further yet; the effort almost stopped her breath, but he was safe at last, beyond the reach of the highest tide.

She took her scent bottle and bathed his face and hands patiently, but for a while it seemed in vain. She began to fear, yes, to fear, now, not to hope, that life would never return, that her enemy was past all help. The sea had almost covered the rocks beside which he had been lying before his eyes opened.

He came to himself slowly, and looked at her in bewilderment for a moment.

"You?" he said, amazed. "What has happened? I was not here when I fell."

"No, you were there," and she pointed to where the waves rushed and tumbled over the tops of the rocks.

"There? Then how did I get here?"

"I brought you."

"Good heavens! you? Were you alone and did that by yourself?"

She gave a little sad smile. "Yes, you were very heavy, but I managed it somehow."

He had risen now and stood before her trembling, partly from the effects of the fall, partly from horror at the position in which he found himself.

"This is terrible," he cried, "terrible. But for you I should be drowned, or, worse, dashed about among the rocks senseless until the last vestige of life was knocked out of me; but for you I should have been dead, and but for me you would have been happy. You knew this, and yet you saved me. Perhaps you thought I should change my mind?"

"No," she said simply, "I did not think so."

"You have acted nobly, bravely, generously, but my duty to my friend remains unchanged."

"Yes," she said, "I never thought otherwise."

Man-like, he was far more moved by her submission than he had been by her pleading. If she had entreated again there is no saying but he might have hardened. As it was he felt his purpose growing weaker and weaker.

"And yet what can I do?" he cried. "You have saved my life, how can I use it against you? If you ask me to keep silence now how can I refuse you?"

But a woman who has overcome so great a temptation is very

strong, for the angels of God stand near to minister to her. She who had pleaded in such pitiful weakness an hour ago spoke out now bravely and clearly.

"I do not ask it. I have deceived my lover too long; tell him all."

"He need tell me nothing. I heard all that passed between you an hour ago."

Startled, they both turned, and saw Harry Lepel before them. The three stood looking at each other without speaking.

"Then you know——" began Dallas.

"Silence," said Lepel shortly; "it is for me to speak now. Sara."

She dared not look up, but she signed to him that she listened, and he spoke, slowly at first, but firmly and steadily.

"Sara, I heard all, and I said we must part. It was bitterer than death to lose you, but there was nothing else for it after what I heard. I tried to speak to Dallas, but he seemed indifferent, and that angered me, so I went away to wait for you. I thought the time would never pass, so I came back to the top of the cliffs to watch for you, and from there I saw what happened. Hush, do not speak yet. I saw all. All, I say. I saw you hesitate, and I saw you win a splendid victory. The woman who could do that is worth any man's love."

He paused, and she, still not daring to raise her eyes, waited breathlessly for his next words.

"You never lied to me about your past; you only kept silence, and that is much easier to forgive. Just now when you had the choice I heard you say you would keep silence no longer. Whatever you have been in the past you are a noble woman now. Sara, if you will love me we will forget the past. Come to me, Sara."

"Is it possible?" she said.

"Come to me and see."

To be in his arms again, forgiven—to be in his arms again, to know the trouble was all over and done with, and that he loved her still, this was a joy too great for speech or question. She lay breathless, with closed eyes, while he kissed her lips, not passionately, but gravely and tenderly, in sign of complete pardon.

"Dallas, you cannot blame me," he said at last. "You cannot say I am wrong. I heard you even now promise silence."

"Blame you? God forbid. Could I ever hope for His forgiveness myself if I grudged her your forgiveness now? You speak coldly, Harry, but I meant to act the part of a friend, and it was very painful to me."

"I know. Presently I will thank you; just now I can only remember how painful it was to her."

"And there is one thing you both ought to know, that you may make your arrangements accordingly. Charlie Vane and his wife

are coming home (he has married Lord Trydeth's daughter, you know), and if he sees Miss Maron he will recognise her."

"Charlie Vane?" Sara looked up joyfully. "Charlie Vane and Miss Trydeth? Ah, that is good. They will speak for me, Harry; they know that, though I was foolish and weak, I hated my life in Paris, and longed to be free from it."

Both men were puzzled.

"My dear, have I misheard?" asked Lepel. "Did you not say that Charles Vane——" he hesitated. "Did I not hear Vane's name mentioned between you and Dallas just now?"

"Of course. It was he who took me away from Paris, you know, Heaven bless him, or I might have been in prison now perhaps for helping Louis Vechamp. Charles Vane took me to Miss Trydeth, and she kept me with her until he found me the work at the library at Saltport. Ah, I was too miserable to feel her goodness then, but we will both thank her now."

"My child," cried Lepel, "my dear foolish child, if that were all, if your secret was no more than this, why did you submit to Dallas? Why did you think my love would fail you?"

"Because he was so sure I was not a fit wife for you, and he was your friend, and knew. Because I was so ashamed of my degrading experiences, and, you know it is true, I did not withstand Louis Vechamp as a brave, wise woman would have done. I had helped him sometimes, because I feared him so. What is it? Why do you both look so strange? Is it possible that you thought—what *did* you think?"

Lepel and Dallas looked at each other, ashamed to say what they had thought. It seemed such madness to have thought it now as she raised her innocent, patient face in puzzled inquiry.

"Ah, I see," she cried at last. "I see. And you could forgive *that*?"

She drew herself out of Harry's arms and stood apart. Woman-like, she could not forgive him for being ready to forgive such a sin.

"You could forgive that? A man like you? Why, he told me——"

Lepel was silent. He had no answer ready, for he was only just beginning to understand himself why he had been able to forgive her.

"What wonder," said Dallas humbly, "what wonder he could forgive it, when even I, who did not love you, who was so bitter against you, was ready to conceal it because of what you had done. You had acted most nobly, I tell you. Had I been in such a strait as you were in just now, I *hope* I should have acted as you did, but how can I be sure?"

"No," said Lepel quietly; "no, it was not only that. My darling, I think it was because, in spite of all I heard, all you seemed to admit, my heart knew your heart, and some instinct stronger than

my reason or understanding made me know you could be nothing that was not true and noble and sweet."

That satisfied her. She came to him again; he put his arm around her, and they walked slowly homewards together.

After a moment or two Lepel turned and looked back.

"Come, Dallas," he called; "we both want you."

And Dallas followed, well content.

"SHEBA."

A STUDY OF GIRLHOOD.

By "RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "DAME DURDEN," "DARBY AND JOAN," "THE LADY NANCY,"
"GRETCHEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"WHEN A STRONGER THAN HE——"

THE strong man armed can keep his house until a stronger than he sets himself to take it. Then—there is but one result possible.

The full force and strength of a mighty passion had lain in wait for possession of Sheba Ormatroyd until she was most weak and most helpless. Then—it swooped with giant force upon her soul and wrapped her round with arms of fire—and was no longer an angel of peace, but a tyrant, fierce and compelling; yet, woman-like she was ready to bend her head and kiss the yoke—to shut her eyes to all and everything around—to float unresisting on the current of a deep and wonderful joy as a tired sleeper whose dreams visit heaven and repay by temporary forgetfulness the woe and misery and weariness of earth. All previous hardships and loneliness and suffering of her life seemed only as far-off memories. She who had never been happy—who had never known love in any shape or form—who had been always misunderstood—despised, tyrannized over—she had won such love as the world could but faintly comprehend—as Life could bestow but once . . . and that once was to her as for ever.

It seemed wonderful—incredible, as she thought of it and of his words, and of the long passionate kiss that had sealed the promise of his truth and thrown open the floodgates of a love that, as yet, had hardly found expression.

But that time was over. It would never be again—never—never—never—she whispered to herself with a regret that was half fearful even in its intensity of joy.

Who can describe Love, or gauge its depths and infinite variety? It is as an indefinable influence that seizes body, soul, and spirit and merges them into the being and existence of another; it is

the subtle recognition of kindred souls—as the electric flash of the storm-clouds—coming one knows not how—falling one knows not where—but once having fallen, its power cannot be recalled—once recognized there is no longer any possibility of darkness or ignorance in all the after years.

Sheba Ormatroyd had thrown herself on her knees in her dark, cool, little chamber, and with her face buried in her clasped hands she tried to think out, calmly and coolly, the events of this one morning.

But calm thought was no longer possible. She could but remember Paul's look and kiss, and her own whispered promise that she would never leave him—never—come what might. She had braved public opinion already. She had gone so far that doubts and scruples looked foolish and cowardly. He loved her as she had always dreamt of love—he needed her, as she needed him. The love of each for the other was grounded in the memory of past years of bitter unhappiness. Life had brought them to each other, and who should say that consolation was impossible or wrong? By the new light that had come to her she began to think of the histories she had read. Of women brave and bold enough to face even worldly condemnation, just for sake of the greatness and strength of love. How many had done it openly and in the light of day—and how many more secretly and undiscovered. What had Pharamond told her of great and gifted women—women who must have been capable of judging as well as feeling? What was the world whispering of its new woman genius who had been content to set its laws and rules at defiance?

Surely one so great—so gifted—so wise—must have counted the cost before taking so bold a step. And she—she was but Sheba Ormatroyd, a friendless unknown girl, whose fate would concern no one—affect no one save herself.

If she left him as she had thought of doing, before—before that fatal interview—where could she go? Who would believe her story? If she went back to her own mother and told her, she knew that she would laugh in her face. As for receiving her, or acknowledging her, Sheba did not need to think twice of the likelihood of such a thing. She seemed to see her mother's face—to hear her stepfather's hoarse laugh, and Dolly's mocking gibes. She had run away to evade a marriage which to them was perfectly honourable, and for three months had lived under the roof of a man who already possessed a wife—and who only at this late hour was endeavouring to evade the legal responsibilities of that possession. In plain words, that was how the world would look at her position; and experience told her that in that world she would find no judge so harsh—no condemnation so cruel as that of her own mother. She thought of the Saxtons. But she did not know now where they were, and how could she expect even gentle Aunt Allison to extenuate her foolish conduct, or believe in her innocence?

No . . . plainly enough there was no help for her. Paul had said so, and Paul was the law and ruler of her life. She had said she would trust him, and he had told her that she should never repent such trust. Then why struggle any longer against the strength of his will, the will that was to her as Fate and to which she felt herself yielding as the tired swimmer yields to the current?

She raised her head, and gazed upwards and around as if seeking counsel. For long she had not prayed. For long she had listened with eager thirsty ears to all the bewildering philosophies that were as familiar as the air he breathed, to Müller. The old childish faiths had fallen from her like a mantle. . . Now a subtle, dangerous fire seemed stealing through her veins. Paul had said, "Let us be a law unto ourselves;" and, alas! her own heart echoed those words with a gladness that almost terrified her. Why should she leave him? Why should she cut herself adrift from the only joy that had ever gladdened her life of harsh repression? No one would suffer because of her actions, for no one cared enough for her to question those actions—no one but Paul; and for Paul henceforth she would live, and in Paul's truth she would trust; and Paul should be her law, even as he was her love, and all her hopes of happiness and all her dreams of greatness might lapse into the sweet and passion-filled ecstasy that his presence alone could bestow.

She rose from her knees. No warning voice chilled her newborn joy. No whisper of prudence, or of wrong, echoed at the passionate portals of her heart.

* * * * *

That night again they met in those great and beautiful solitudes of Nature. They met and spoke as only hearts speak when all barriers are broken down, and all disguise impossible. The calm soft eyes of the starlit heavens were the sole witnesses of the love that bound them to each other. The voice of Nature—hushed and tranquil as the midnight stillness—the only voice that breathed out any blessing, or prayer of consecration. Heart to heart, soul to soul they stood, trembling and half fearful of the intense and passionate love that, freed from all restraint, spoke out at last its mutual idolatry.

It seemed as if a god had descended and held out to them a gift so wonderful and beautiful that they scarce dared take it, but even as he laid it at their feet he whispered in their ears, "Ye are but sleepers, blind and dumb, yet so long as ye sleep shall love seem true and beautiful and abiding. But your hour of waking shall surely come; yea—surely as your hour of death!"

CHAPTER XLV.

“IF DREAMS COULD LAST.”

A YEAR had passed.

A year of changing seasons—of tropical storms—of rains and floods—of seedtime and harvests. It had brought many changes, for Time marched with quick step in the youth of the Australian colonies. Progress was alert and busy, not weighted and slow of movement. To plan and to act were almost simultaneous in impulse, and Nature was ever ready to lend kindly aid to man's enterprise and skill. Melbourne was a populous and beautiful city, though wanting the picturesque situation and lovely surroundings of its sister of Sydney. Wealth, ambition and self-confidence were hard at work in the broad streets, and public offices, and gay and glittering shops. Enterprise was at its height and seldom failed to grasp the prize it desired. Brains and handicraft found a ready mart. Money was plentiful, and labour received even more than its adequate value.

A year had passed since Sheba Ormatroyd had stood hand in hand with her lover beneath the midnight stars and vowed that his love should be her law. A year had passed since Mrs. Levison had awakened to the fact that her will was not absolute; since her daughter had fled from her roof; since Bessie Saxton had married Pharamond. Mr. Levison had attained his ambition and was now in Parliament. Dolly went to a fashionable and expensive school. Hex was neither better nor worse than the average youth of colonial towns, except in the matter of idleness and self-indulgence, virtues in which he excelled and in the furtherance of which his foolish and blindly adoring mother helped considerably to aid him.

Sheba's name was never mentioned in that home circle. Even the brother with whom she had played as a child and whom she had loved so warmly, scarcely ever gave a thought to her memory. The family verdict had been passed on her conduct and never recalled. She “had made a fool of herself,” in their candid parlance, and having done so they unanimously turned their backs on her and professed to care no longer for her future or what she might make of it. They considered her “a disgrace,” and as such were only too ready to wipe her very memory off their minds as a finished or useless sum might be wiped off a slate. The Opera Company that had worked all these grievous disasters had returned to England. They naturally supposed Sheba had gone also.

But Meredith had not returned with the company. The tenor, Rialo, had recovered and taken his old place. Paul had chosen to remain in Melbourne, where he gave singing-lessons at half-a-guinea a lesson to the daughters of the city magnates, and was the star of all the public concerts and entertainments given there. It was

not a life he liked or desired, but until that case was decided he had determined to stay in Melbourne and therefore turned his talents to their best account, as did Franz Müller also.

The old German and little Paul and Sheba Ormatroyd lived in a small wooden house of one storey, standing on an elevated plateau about a mile distant from the town itself. Paul Meredith did not live with them, but came two or three times a week, as his leisure allowed, and always on Sunday.

The little house was to him a paradise of rest and beauty. It stood amidst the shade of giant eucalyptus trees; the trellised front of the verandah was festooned with bongainvilleas and passion-flowers; the garden hedged with purple tamarisk and rose thickets, and bright with oleanders and scarlet geraniums.

For a year this had been Sheba Ormatroyd's home. A year that had passed like a dream of delight; in whose charmed hours her soul lay rocked to slumber; a year of deep sweet restfulness which had wrapped her in a trance of joy more exquisite than any fancy had pictured. Nothing had disturbed or intruded on that peaceful home; no rude breath, no prying gaze, no worldly wisdom. The depth and tenderness of an infinite love had sheltered her from every blast, protected her from every care, was around her and about her like the sunlight and the air, and seemed to breathe a charm around the little dwelling that kept such things as sorrow or misfortune far away.

A year. One whole good glad year of pure, full-toned joy. Well, such years are rare enough. One should take them thankfully and reverently, and with fear, when they do come, and so Sheba took hers. Trembling, mute, and half afraid of the deep, deep joy it brought, and seeing in Love still the Angel of Dreams who holds all heaven in that magic sleep which for one brief moment is granted to mortal eyes; a year, not of idleness, for heart and mind had alike found food, and she had grown in mental stature as in physical beauty; a year of full busy hours, and of rest the sweeter for the labour that brought it; a year that had seen her childish dreams almost realized and proved that she was capable of work that might in time claim the world's attention and win for her that coveted wreath of Fame which never seems valueless till—attained.

Her book had been published in Melbourne by a firm who had also a London house, and had met with astonishing success. She had now regular journalistic work for one of the leading papers, and this kept her well employed in the time when she was not teaching little Paul, and served to render still more enchanting those brief charmed hours when her lover's presence brought her holiday and idleness.

In those days the arena of literature was not so crowded with female aspirants as now, and work was easier to obtain and better paid. Now female recruits in the army of labour rush into all its

ranks and grades, and rally round every profession and almost every trade. Now we rejoice in an age that has created the penny dreadful, and the weekly sensational, the romantic, the impossible, the realistic, the illiterate, the useless, and various other styles of literature, in all of which the female brain is prolific and the female hand pre-eminent. The underpaid governess, the extravagant schoolgirl, the dressmaker's apprentice, the daughter who lacks pocket-money, and the daughter who does *not*—all these fly to fiction as a means of eking out a livelihood, or making one if they are lucky. Even nursemaids have been bold enough to try their 'prentice hands at story writing, besides another class who shall be nameless, and are ready and willing to give their productions for no remuneration save the honour and glory of seeing themselves in print—a glory for which they have even been known to *pay*! If it were for the benefit or the suppression of this latter class that the office of critic had been established one might allow it *had* a use, which is sometimes a doubtful question among authors.

But Sheba Ormatroyd had not the honour of struggling for a place amidst this crowd of aspirants; and her own gifts and Müller's careful supervision and kindly criticism speedily won her success. She loved her work too ardently and enthusiastically to be easily satisfied with what she accomplished; but that element of dissatisfaction is in itself a help to effort, and prevents author and artist alike from sinking into carelessness, or content—two of the worst foes genius has to combat.

How happy that year had been, defies all words to paint.

It was an ideal life—the life of all others suited to the girl's temperament and nature.

The change in her was almost marvellous—as great a change as day brings to the silvery greyiness of the dawn, as the sun pours over a world of shadow and of gloom. It was a change in face, stature, form—nay, in her every movement. The glow in her eyes, the soft colour in her face, the happy smile of the mouth, the dreamful tenderness of expression—how can words describe them!

To Meredith she seemed more lovely every time he saw her; but he was wiser than most lovers, in that he did not see her too often, for he was determined that no breath of satiety should dim the glory of their passion—it was to be the rest and beauty of their lives, not the burdened associate.

So still they had their charmed hours, their days of sweet "do nothing," and still they kept the poetry and beauty of their love sheltered and apart from scorn or knowledge of the world beyond those rose-set hedges.

Müller never interfered with them now. They were free to wander off where and when they pleased—to spend sweet, dreamy, idle hours together under the shade of the garden trees, or the glory of the summer nights. Love was still absorbing and still

divine. For them the outer world had no existence in those hours. Thoughts, hopes, desires, dreams—all hovered round each other and seemed as things holy and apart, which love had consecrated and time but made more beautiful. The daily life, the work and ambitions it brought were things out of sight and afar. Peace, security, serenity, the isolation of a great and intense passion—these alone were admitted into thought or word—these still guarded the gates of their paradise.

"Two love, and one tires," says a proverb; but there was no question of tiring here, for the love was equal—and as yet unsullied by one thought of shame, one touch of regret. Sheba never felt the need of other companionship than was contained within the walls of that small wooden house. Those of her own sex with whom she had associated had never been of a kind to make her desire further acquaintance. There was no woman who would have understood her, or sympathized with her, save perhaps Allison Saxton, and of her she had heard nothing since they had last parted in Sydney.

So this year had passed in unbroken tranquillity, and when one looks out on life and sees how brief are its allowances of happiness, a year seems a great deal. It was scarcely, however, to be expected that it should repeat itself. No such thing as continuous joy is possible in this world, whatever may be the rule in another. So the white-winged angel of peace received orders forthwith, and in his place came a stern and gloomy form, armed with a sword which, with the inevitable justice of fate, was destined to pierce the weakest heart, and most defenceless life, of that doomed household.

It was on one sultry summer evening that the blow fell—fell without warning or premonition. It chanced that on this special evening Paul Meredith had driven over to the little house in his light buggy. They had not expected him, and Sheba had gone down to the Yarra valley with little Paul. Müller was sitting in the verandah, smoking as usual. He was attired in an airy costume of grey alpaca; before him was a table containing fruit, wine and iced water, and a low bamboo lounge by his side was littered with books and music.

"*Lieber Himmel!*" he cried, taking out his pipe and surveying Paul with astonishment. "What brings you here to-night, *mein Freund?* We did not expect—oh, you need not look, she is not here; she went down to the river for a breath of air . . . I trust she may find it. Myself—I like to keep still and smoke off the mosquitoes. That is the best way to cool oneself—*nicht wahr?*"

"No doubt," said Paul, seating himself also. "Well, because the mail is in, for one thing, and I thought the papers would amuse you all; and because in passing Wilson's, I looked in and found a note for Sheba. It is addressed to 'The Author of

"Damaris." I thought Sheba would like to have it. I suppose it is from some one who has read the book."

"No doubt," said Müller. "Well, you had best wait till she returns—I suppose that won't be very long, as the boy is with her. Open your papers and let us hear the news of the old country. Begin with the *Times*—births, deaths, marriages . . . Why, Paul, what is it?"

He was staring aghast and amazed at the ashy face before him. Paul could not speak for a minute. His eyes were fastened on one line of the column at which he had carelessly glanced on opening the paper . . . His face had grown white as death . . . "Good God!" he cried below his breath; "look there, Müller, in the obituary list . . . there, man—the third and fourth names!"

Müller took the paper from his trembling hands. He saw the deaths announced of Viscount Dormer, eldest son, and Lord Arthur Herbert, second son, of the Earl of Annesley, at his residence, Castle Annesley, near Durham. The two young men had died of typhoid fever within two days of each other.

"Well!" he said, as he handed back the paper; "what are they to you that you so distress yourself? Relatives—friends, eh?"

"They are my brothers," answered Paul in a strange husky voice. "The earl is my father. He had four sons . . . The youngest died as an infant—I was the third—now don't you see what it means? These two stood between me and the title. My eldest brother was just going to be married . . . I—I can't believe it, Müller . . . I had quarrelled with my father . . . He swore he would never receive me again, and now I—I—"

"Precisely," said the old German, quite unmoved by the announcement. "It is only the irony of Fate . . . she exemplifies herself once more. You, the discarded, the despised, are the future earl. That is just what one might expect. Do you wish me to congratulate you?"

"Congratulate me. Good God! Don't you see the difficulties, the complications? I may have to go back to England. There is the child . . . see how it alters his position . . . and Sheba—"

"What of her?" asked Müller sharply, struck by something in the young man's tone.

His head drooped on his hands. "Oh, God!" he cried hoarsely; "that I were free—that I were free."

The old German laid his pipe down on the table, and deliberately surveyed him.

"Paul," he said, "what do you mean? There is remorse in your voice . . . Free, of course you will be free. It is only a question of time. That artful hussey has been clever enough to

secure the best lawyer in Melbourne, and your funds did not allow of extensive outlay, otherwise your case would have been settled long ago."

"Yes," cried Paul, starting to his feet and pacing to and fro the verandah in a distraught fashion. "But it comes on next month. If I don't win it—if judgment goes against me.—Oh, heavens! Müller, how can I tell you? Have you been blind? Can't you guess? In four months' time Sheba will be a mother."

Müller sprang from his chair, his eyes blazing with wrath, a fierce oath hissed through his clenched teeth. "So—Paul Meredith, *this* is your honour! And I—trusted you!"

"Stay, Müller, hear me!" cried the young man miserably. "You know I would have married her long ago if it had been possible. As it is, the moment I am free she shall be my wife. In God's name, man, don't look at me like that. I love her beyond and above everything this world holds."

"You—love—her," cried the old man slowly and distinctly. "You love her . . . and see what you have made of her life. You will be called back to your native land, to honours, rank, wealth; and—she, what place can you give there to your mistress and your illegitimate child? Answer me that! Ah! you shudder; the words are coarse, they hurt you, but they are true—true, do you hear, and all the world will say them! A secret like this is just the very secret that you can never hide. Do you suppose that *that* woman does not know—that she would not—for revenge—tell out the history of your actions *here*. Do you think there is one of your fine friends over there in that land of your birth, who would receive Sheba Ormatroyd as your wife, knowing that she was first your mistress?"

"Oh, hush," cried Paul in agonized entreaty—but the entreaty came too late. In the doorway behind Müller stood Sheba herself. She had caught the sound of her own name. She had heard those last cruel words. She saw that one face of anger and disgust, and that other of pain and love and anguish, turned towards her. She saw, and a scorching flush as of some suddenly revealed shame stained her white uplifted face. Then brokenly she cried, "Oh, Paul—Paul!" and fled to him, and hid her face on his breast, trembling and weeping like a child.

That sight smote Müller to the heart. She so brave, and queenly, and beautiful, the girl of whose gifts and intellect and purity he had been so proud—she to shrink from his gaze, and hide her face from sight as if her secret were branded there for every eye to read.

Wrath and pain made him savage. How could he have been so blind—how dreamt that the patience which age and philosophy had brought to him was possible to one in whose pulses the vein of life was keen and potent? Love held a Tantalus cup—not a soothing draught. Had he not himself said hearts were treacherous, and

the voice of nature stronger than that of prudence; but though he had said it, he had believed in Paul, and as for Sheba, no goddess of marble could have seemed to him more pure and cold and stately and after all after all. He was not harsh enough, or pitiless enough, to hurl at her the bitter truths that moralists love. That one look at her changed face, the sight of that mute shamed gesture with which she hid her eyes on the breast of the man who had wronged her, smote him to the heart.

He turned away. He felt he dared not trust himself to speak. Paul had wronged her. Paul must console her—if it were possible now that she had learnt the truth.

He felt instinctively that she had never realized or recognized it, until those harsh coarse words from his own lips had taught it her. He would have recalled them had it been possible, but it was too late. The bandage had fallen from her eyes at last. For the future—his brow grew dark as he thought of it. What could the future be to her now, since fate never allowed the crooked path to become straight, or brought one single wished-for gift to a human life until it had ceased to need, or desire it?

CHAPTER XLVI.

"NOT SINGLE SPIES—BUT IN BATTALIONS."

PAUL swept aside the books and papers from the low bamboo lounge, and drew Sheba down beside him there.

"Dearest," he whispered entreatingly, "you must not grieve. Müller is naturally angry because he thinks we have deceived him. No third person can ever comprehend what we two are to one another. They judge us by commonplace rules and standards."

"What did he mean?" she said hoarsely. "He spoke of England You are not going there, Paul not going to leave me—*now*?"

"I will never leave you, Sheba," he said solemnly. "You might know that. But something has happened, dear, that alters all my prospects in life. I find by the English papers that my two brothers are dead. I—I never told you who I really was. There seemed so little likelihood that I should ever be anything but plain Paul Meredith, but now, owing to these deaths I stand next heir to an earldom in England, and my father, the present earl, is seventy-six years of age. So, dearest, it might chance that I have to go there some day. But not now, not perhaps for years, and long before then you will be my own lawful wife. Would to God you were so now at this moment."

"He said, 'Who in that land would receive me as your wife, knowing I had been your mistress,'" said the girl, lifting her white face from his breast. "Is that true, Paul? for I know nothing—

nothing of what the world says—only that I loved you and trusted you."

All the soft colour had left her face. Her eyes were full of pain and fear. The bolt had fallen into her paradise at last, and with it had come knowledge and shame. Never again could she sink into the blind sweet trance of this past year, never again follow with closed and happy eyes the flowery path where love had set her feet.

"It is not—true," he said passionately. "They shall never know—who but ourselves is aware of the secret? Müller would never betray it. When once this case of mine is settled I will wed you at once with all due legal form and ceremony. Ah, my Sheba, how you have talked and longed for a sight of the old country, and now it is feasible and probable. How glorious it will be to show you my house and possessions. Such a beautiful old place the castle is, Sheba, and what a lovely stately countess you will make, my darling. Not one of my ancestors can show a bride worthy to vie with my beautiful Australian flower."

He drew her close to him with a sudden passionate impulse, but she gave a little cry, and his arms relaxed their hold. She was so white, he feared she was about to faint. "What is it?" he cried alarmed. "Did I hurt you?" Their eyes met. He saw a hot flush dye her cheek. She was trembling greatly.

"Oh, Paul! Paul!" she cried. "It is all changed—it is all different—we can never be the same to each other any more. It is not possible. The world will not allow it. It was so easy to say we would be a law to ourselves . . . but now . . . it all looks so different . . . and I . . . do you think I did not see in Müller's face what men will think of me . . . to what coarse interpretation my actions lend themselves, and yet God knows I loved you so utterly, so blindly, there was no thought of wrong-doing. Oh, why did you not let me go that day when first I learnt my true position? I ought not to have remained. I felt it, then. I feel it doubly now."

"Can you look back on this year," he said, "and ask that question? Have we not tasted such happiness as is given to few mortals ever to know? What could the world have given us in place of it?"

"Not the world," she said, "but our own hearts' approval —"

"We should have been miserable," he said; "I could not have borne to lose you, Sheba. Perhaps it was that fear which led me into deeper wrong. . . . But why talk of it? You are mine and I am yours till death parts us. . . . Now put off that sad face; I cannot bear that you should reproach me. See, here are the letters that the mail brought; I haven't looked at them yet: one from the London publishers for you. . . . Oh, that reminds me, I called in at Wilson's this afternoon and found this letter; it bears the Sydney post-mark—addressed to the author of 'Damaris.' Perhaps it is an offer for another book."

She took the letter from his hand and glanced at the direction. He saw her start. "It is from Noel Hill," she cried breathlessly. "How has he found out my secret?"

The book had been published under an assumed name. Wonderingly, she tore open the envelope and read how he had fathomed the secret of its authorship.

"Dear madam," it began, "I may of course be mistaken, but in reading the book '*Damaris*,' I seemed to recognize the style and workmanship of an old pupil of mine, Sheba Ormatroyd. I have lost sight of her for nearly eighteen months, and was under the impression she had married and gone to England. If I am mistaken, pray forgive me; if *not*, let me assure Sheba Ormatroyd that her old friend and teacher Noel Hill, is most anxious for news of her welfare, and begs her to give him the assurance of her happiness and health. Should the writer of this note be addressing a stranger, he begs to apologize, and to plead as his excuse sincere admiration for the literary workmanship of her admirable novel."

Paul had read the note with Sheba. At its conclusion they turned and looked at each other. The girl's face was pale and frightened.

"Sydney is so near," she cried suddenly, "and if he hears I did write the book . . . that I am living here . . . he may come to see me, and oh, what would he think? what would he say? He is so good; he was always so kind to me, and I could not tell him a lie. And he is a clergyman, you know —"

"Yes, I know," said Paul. "But why should he come here? You need not give him your address, or you can say you are just about to sail for England."

Her eyes fell on the familiar writing. She seemed to see that young pale earnest face—to look back once more into the serious kindly eyes of Noel Hill.

"I could not write to him," she said, "and not speak the truth. Perhaps I had better not write at all."

"You must please yourself about that," said Meredith coldly.

He was not at all pleased at this intrusion. He disliked clergymen nearly as much as Müller did, and he had no desire to have one intimate with Sheba, and speaking out clerical views of morality in her ears. The change in his voice struck the girl's keen perception. She looked up at his clouded face.

"Are you vexed about this, Paul," she said. "You need not be. I will not write to him, and he will suppose he has made a mistake. Still"—and the shy, warm colour stole back to her face—"still, I am so pleased he liked my book; he is so clever and so well-read, his opinion is worth a great deal."

"It would be difficult for any one not to like that book," said Paul gently; "you have real genius, my dearest, and the world will be at your feet one day."

"As if I cared for that," she said, looking back into his eyes, "so long as I have your praise, and your love."

"You know you will have my love till the last hour of my life," he said passionately. "Oh, God! that I were not such a chained galley slave; that I were free to give you that honour in the world's sight, which you have in mine."

Her eyes drooped. "It is not for myself," she said faintly; "but I never thought, I never guessed, what wrong I might do to another life. Oh, to think, Paul, that however we might keep our secret from the world's knowledge, however dear or faithful we are to each other, a day may come when our own child will have it in its power to upbraid us, to curse me—its mother."

"Hush, for God's sake," cried Meredith stormily. "Such a day may never come. I have wealth now at my disposal and can set those cumbersome legal machines going at a different speed. The moment the courts meet, the case will come on. There is still time, you see. I—I am to blame I know. I should have considered such a possibility. Still we need not look on the gloomy side of the subject, dear one; the day must come at last when I am free, and then ——"

He stooped and kissed her lips under the shade of the falling darkness, and for a moment she clung to him mutely, sorrowfully, as if he were indeed her only shield and protector now.

Then she drew herself away, and folded Noel Hill's letter into its cover once more.

"You have not read yours, Paul," she said glancing at the packet on the table.

"They are from the English lawyers," he said. "I told them to address me at Melbourne when I left home. I suppose it is only the announcement of those poor fellows' deaths."

He moved away from her side to where the light fell, and carelessly opened one of the letters. He read it through quite silently, though his face grew pale as death. Sheba still lay back on the low bamboo lounge, her eyes fixed on the folded sheets that contained Noel Hill's message. For a moment she had forgotten Paul.

Presently the rustling of the paper made her look up. She read a change in his face, and in a moment was beside him. "What is it?" she cried. "More troubles? Oh, Paul—Paul!"

"My father," he cried hoarsely. "Oh, Sheba, what can I do; what ought I to do? He is ill—dying they say. His one cry is for me, his only son; he always loved me so, and we parted in bitter anger; and he forgives me, he needs me. Oh, child, this is cruel to you. One blow follows another, and yet—and yet ——"

"You ought to go," she said in a strange slow voice, unlike her own. "Yes, Paul, you ought to go. I have lost my father too. Oh, what I would have given to hear one last word from him. He was so good to me always; he loved me, I know, and then . . . he

died quite suddenly without one farewell word, and this is worse for you parted in anger."

"Yes," he said, "and it was my fault. Poor father; he prophesied I should repent. God! if he could see me now."

"I always had roving blood in my veins," he went on presently, forgetful for a moment of the girl who stood beside him in the patience of pain and endurance. "I was restless, passionate, wilful. I never thought I should be wanted at home. It seemed out of all probability, so I took my own way and came out here, and all these years I have heard nothing, save just some business communication from the lawyer; and now . . . my dearest, it is too hard. I cannot leave you."

"And I cannot go with you," she said mournfully; "you must leave me, Paul. Your father has a greater claim than I."

"If I go," he said hesitatingly, "I ought to take Paul. You know what all this means for him."

"Yes," she said, and shivered as if with sudden cold. How these words brought before her the difference. The child born in wedlock, even though his mother was so vile a creature, would have honour, name and rights that her child could never possess. For the first time her heart seemed to grow pitiful and yearning towards that unborn, nameless thing to which her sin would give life, whose feeble existence would have its first claim on herself. For the first time she realized that, though her love was pure and holy, and great beyond all power of expression, it had held some claim on her womanhood which she had disregarded.

A man might do what he chose. A woman could not. She had always to consider the fate of others, to whom she might make life a shame or a glory, in whose power she placed the right to condemn or justify herself. And this was what she had done. She had never regretted it—never looked upon it as a sacrifice till this hour; but now she could never be blind again—never—never, far as the years might roll.

It would be no use to tell herself other women had done the same, and the world had thought, or seemed to think, none the worse of them. The greatest genius could not extenuate a sin; the most subtle reasoning could not make wrong right.

Suddenly, without warning, without preparation, the veil was rent from her eyes. That look of Müller's was the first look that taught her the meaning of shame. If he, who loved her so dearly, could condemn her thus, what would the world's verdict be? The world that Paul had dreamed she could face as his wife—his wife, while yet those harsh and hateful words rang in her ears, "They will say you have married your mistress."

"Sheba," said Paul's voice beside her, "dearest, where are your thoughts? I have called you twice."

She started, and turned her beautiful sad eyes to the face she had loved so well, ay, loved to her own undoing. "What is it?"

she said wearily. "Any new misfortune. I seem to realize what Job felt when one messenger of ill arrived on the heels of another."

"You may well say that," he answered. "I asked you if you thought you could risk the voyage, supposing I left at once."

She shuddered away from his encircling arm. "Oh, no!" she cried, "I could not. How can you ask, Paul? It is not only myself; but how could I go to your own land, your own home, with this uncertainty still hanging over my head? And supposing the case goes against you, after all."

"It cannot," he cried stormily. "It is impossible, the evidence is too plain."

"You cannot tell that," she said sadly. "No, Paul, I will remain here; but you must go; there is no help for it."

"How can I go?" he cried bitterly. "How can I leave you now, just when you need all my care, all my love? No, I cannot go, Sheba; not yet, not until you are safe and well once more."

"And meanwhile," she said unsteadily, "your father may die."

He almost groaned as he turned aside and leant against the slender flower-wreathed column of the verandah. "Was ever man so tortured?" he cried desperately. "What is to be done?"

"I have told you," the girl said, trying to speak coldly and calmly for all the pain and terror at her heart. "You must go. I will remain here. Perhaps Müller will forgive me when he knows all, and how I suffer——"

"Müller has nothing to forgive you, *mein Fräulein*. . . . *Ach*, he was a brute and a fool just now. Do not think of it. He asks your pardon. . . . He will be your friend, your father still. Yes, come to me; weep your fill—that is a woman's comfort. Nay, Paul, you need not be jealous of these old arms. I was harsh and unjust just now. I forgot how much I too am to blame with my cold, hard, damned philosophies. I took all away from her, poor child—her simple faiths, her clinging irrational hopes. Foolish they may be—and are; but they are a woman's salvation. And I reduced everything to bare fact and reason, and the guidance of individual brains, and this is the result. I wanted her to love art, and to seek knowledge; but how can a female thing live on this earth without love? and once she loves what does she care for all the wisdom, and all the power, and all the glory of earth? Nothing, nothing at all. Nay, let her weep, Paul. We are all friends once more . . . it will do her good. I am only her rough old Müller, but I will care for her, do not you fear. And now let us be calm and rational, and talk over all that has happened. If you must go to England, she shall stay with me. I will take of her every care; she shall be safe and well, and write another wonderful book—is it not so, *meine Liebe*? There, look up and smile once more; life is too short for quarrels. Come, Paul, sit down

here, and let us talk. For me, I will smoke and advise. I know you are both naughty children, but I forgive; only you must have no secrets from your old Müller—never any more—mind, I tell it you—never any more."

"Never any more," said Paul heartily, as he drew Sheba to his side; "but, oh, Müller, how can I leave her? It will break my heart."

"Pooh," scoffed the old German, "break your heart! Did one ever hear such stuff; as if hearts break so easy. Be not a fool, my dear Paul. Your heart will not break—no; nor that of my clever beautiful *Fräulein* either; old Müller will see to that. Parting—well, it is a little hard, I know. You are like two children—scarce out of leading-strings yet; a toothache or a cut finger, they scare you so, you think to die. Bah! you will not die of the pain, or the scare. Get it over quick—sharp; that is my advice. Then afterwards—so much the greater the joy and the relief."

But though he talked on so cheerfully his heart was bitter within him, and always he seemed to see a pale proud face dyed red with the scorch of shame, and a queenly head hidden in sudden terrified abandonment from the scathing rebuke of an honest condemnation.

Always he saw that, and his heart ached as it had never ached for any living thing, and there seemed to him something tragic and terrible about this lonely girl, who had known no love till love came disguised in a beauty that had only wrought evil in her life, and yet had drawn that life and all its innocence and genius to his keeping, without regret—without pity, without remorse.

It was but an old story repeated. The story that the world knows by heart, yet repeats and repeats till one would think the iteration was but a wearisome chorus, tuneless and dull, and with never a ring of melody in the familiar notes.

Such an old, old story. But to think that Sheba's lips should tell it. To think of the many foolish, careless, useless lives in the world without, and that this one should be wrecked and ruined for sake of a man's selfish and exacting passion. She could never be the same to him again—never, or to any man who knew. That is man's strange way of visiting offences, or at least that *one* offence to which they lend all their art and skill of tempting, and then most bitterly condemn.

And Müller was afraid of Paul, well as he knew him; afraid of this sudden change of fortune, of the effects of the old familiar life, the luxury and beauty, the exactions of rank and honour. Yes, he was afraid and doubtful, for all he talked so bravely and cheerfully. He knew the world so well, and the worth of love, of any man's love who had gained all that a woman can bestow, and makes her very generosity the excuse for condemnation, when the fire of passion gives place to the convenience of morality.

He knew it all, in every grade and phase of the sad old Faust story, and, knowing it, he felt his heart ache with sudden strange foreboding over the fate of this girl, whom he loved as he had never loved a human creature in all the hard and toilful years of his own strange, tangled life.

"If I believed in prayers to a God, or a Heaven," he muttered to himself, as he looked at the two sitting so pale and silent in the clear sweet moonlight, "I should feel inclined to pray their care for her. She will need it ere many months are past."

(*To be continued.*)

LONDON LETTERS,
TO VARIOUS COUNTRY COUSINS.

No. IV.

DEAR COUSINS,

People call this an age of shams, but do you know, in my humble opinion, I really think we are more sincere than we used to be, as a nation, or rather socially. For instance, we are so sadly unfashionable as to be in town in August, but we do not dream of living in back rooms with the front ones shuttered and newspapered, and pretending that we are not here. Nor do our other friends whom circumstances have compelled to remain within the large embrace of London. Yet such things were, according to a general and unanimous concatenation of opinion. And if we may judge of the girls of the former generation by the novels of their time, we have the advantage of them in sincerity in very many ways. They appear to have affected never to be hungry, but were strongly suspected of eating abundantly in the seclusion of their own rooms in order to be able to reject food when at the table. We should never dream of such nonsense nowadays, should we? We do not mind in the very least acknowledging that we are "starving," as we express it, with our usual exaggeration.

I shrewdly suspect that our grandmothers, when they were young, were a very hypocritical and affected set of girls. But I suppose it was the custom for women to display "sensibility," and to behave at table and elsewhere as though they were in the last stage of galloping consumption.

Yes, here we are in town, and rather enjoying it than otherwise. Of course, the seaside, in theory, is a delicious thing, and when one longs for it in town, it presents itself in a charming and most inviting aspect. At that distance it is a vision of sweets without a bitter drop. But when one has the cup to one's lips, the defects of the beverage make themselves distinctly perceptible. To drop into prose, forsaking allegory and all its pitfalls, do we not sacrifice comfort most unmistakably when we go to the sea? If we take a furnished house, its meagreness of equipment is a constant annoyance to flesh and spirit. If we go to a hotel, the terrific charges weigh down the lightest heart with a perpetual foreboding of a stupendous bill to come. If we go into lodgings,

is there ever a comfortable chair or couch to be found upon which we may abandon ourselves to the drowsiness that is certain to attack us during the first few days of our "change of air?" Are not the other lodgers too often so many thorns in our sides? Do they not bang the doors continually all day long, play the banjo from midday to midnight, and in a dozen other ways make us feel that we can well understand the two patriarchs of old when they decided that the land would not hold them both? How thoroughly they enable us to enter into the spirit of Jaques' remark when he says "Good-bye! let's meet as seldom as we can!"

And even if there are no other lodgers, does not the housekeeper of our party make life a burden to us with her anxieties as to the petty larcenous propensities with which her over-zealous care has credited the landlady. Her minute examination of the joint when it re-appears is almost ludicrously funny. Its slimness, as compared with the comfortable outlines of yesterday, is commented upon in tragic tones, and the question as to whether a fowl went from the table with half a breast or none, and if it then possessed a liver or not, is discussed in a manner that makes one glad the wretched bird cannot hear what is said.

And another element of discomfort lies in the fact that one always takes hot weather gowns when the rain it raineth every day, and warm ones when the heat is tropical. The books one wants to read are always "out" at the circulating libraries, and if they are in, one cannot read them without being annoyed by the silly pencil annotations of some previous reader. Horrid habit it is to scribble in books even if they are not the property of other people. Then there are the wet days—how endless they seem, and how dismal the prospect out of doors! And even on fine days, are not half the children crying on the beach, and is not the Ethiopian minstrel everywhere?

Now, is not that a fair catalogue of ills from a "sour grapes" point of view?

We have made various little excursions in the environs of London, and have learned to appreciate their beauties as we never did before. On one day we went to Kew Gardens, and delighted in the wonderful variety of trees and shrubs to be found in the well-kept grounds. There is a magnificent Californian oak not far from one of the entrances which would enchant the true Yankee. We found our way to the river, and sat there for a long time after our woodland ramble in the wilder and more rustic portion of the grounds. Another day we went to Hampton Court, and studied the pictures there, unconsciously imbibing a page of history in so doing. Then we wandered in the grounds, and after listening to the birds, we had tea at a hotel, ordered our dinner, went on the river in a boat for an hour, and returned to enjoy the repast with marvellous appetites. Windsor was our playground on another occasion, and as we wanted to hear the nightingales, we arranged

to stay at a hotel there all night. This was, on the whole, the pleasantest expedition of all, and we agreed in wondering at ourselves that we had not begun to do this kind of thing long ago. One Thursday we went to Twickenham by train, and had a ramble through the fields, then took a boat back to Richmond, where we had tea in the beautiful public gardens that have of late years been opened under the Terrace. They are well wooded and skillfully planned, and we enjoyed our small excursion very much. So, you see, you must not imagine, dear cousins, that you enjoy a monopoly of rural joys. You must know, however, that it is chiefly 'Arry and his 'Arriett who patronize these places. I see no reason why others should not enjoy them as well, and it is not difficult to choose the day and hour when 'Arry is pretty certain to be otherwise engaged. Mondays, Saturdays, and Wednesday afternoons may be carefully avoided, and it is hardly necessary to remark that Bank Holidays are *not* the best to choose for a suburban excursion. We are even meditating a day in Epping Forest, but the worst of that is that it is such a distance to Liverpool Street Station, and from there one has to go a long way down by train so as to get clear into the country. Other places on our list are Broxbourne, with its lovely country; St. Albans by coach and to stay the night; Box Hill, with a ramble among the Surrey hills, dinner and beds at a hotel. Do you not think that, on the whole, we shall fare as well, in the matter of holidays, as many who have a month at the seaside? Our greatest ambition of all is to camp out for a week or so, but the mother forbids it. She says she does not want to nurse us all three during the winter. She is ambitious too, she remarks, but not of such high privilege as this. So camping out has to be given up until the climate improves. Will such happy consummation ever come? Meanwhile, we three girls are going to save up, dress on two-thirds of our allowance, and rent a cottage with a large garden about three-quarters of an hour from town. We are to do all the gardening ourselves, and old nurse and her husband are to live in our cottage all the year round. In the summer we shall invite our parents and the boys to come and stay with us. Mother enters heartily into the scheme, and says it will teach us the value of money better than anything else could. She has made a list of the furniture she will give us towards our cottage. The rest, she says, we must buy. We are to keep accounts of all outlay, and father is to audit them, so that each of the three partners may know exactly what she has to pay and what is done with her money. Father and mother are to pay us for their board while they are with us, and have promised to buy fruit, vegetables and flowers from us for their use in town. Is it not fun? And by no means the worst of our pleasant little plan is the fun of looking for the cottage of our dreams. Do you not envy us?

C. E. H.

LONDON SOCIETY.

OCTOBER, 1889.

A NEW OTHELLÒ.

A NOVEL.

By IZA DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE, HONOUR AND OBEDY," "NOT EASILY JEALOUS" "ONLY A LOVE STORY,"
"LOVE IN IDLENESS," ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER XII.

"WOUNDED LOVE WILL TURN AND STING."

"This man was true! He loved me night and day,
And though I spurned at him, he loves me yet."

THE next morning, when Ray saw Asenath on deck, he ventured to bow to her, although in considerable doubt as to how his greeting might be received. To his great relief she returned the salutation, very slightly and coldly, but still she did return it. The breeze had freshened during the night; the sky was cloudy, only here and there glints of blue peeped out between the clouds; the green waves were tipped with light crests of snow, and the vessel "rocked in the cradle of the deep" with a rhythmical motion that induced a restful mood amongst those of the passengers who were the poorest sailors.

Asenath remained on deck; so did Ray. He pursued his yesterday's tactics in keeping away from her for awhile; indeed, during all the early part of the day he let her alone, although he seldom went very far from the side of the deck where she was. Once he saw—and frowned in seeing—a man by her side, talking to her in evidently agreeable strain, a young man, too, and more-over a good-looking one. Ray chafed at this sight as he sat sulkily aloof, but the objectionable fellow-passenger fortunately did not manifest any exclusive devotion to Mrs. Fitzallan; he presently turned his attention to the other fair faces on board; a pair of pretty sisters caught his admiration, and he moved on to

fresh woods and pastures new. Not until late in the afternoon did Ray make up his mind to venture on addressing Asenath again. Then, seeing her sitting alone, and an unoccupied camp-stool near her, he approached and inquired very deferentially :

"May I not sit here for five minutes now?"

"If you wish it," she replied frigidly, scarcely deigning to give him a glance.

Even this grudging permission was almost more than he had dared to hope for; and perhaps indeed she might not have granted it if it had not been for his steady adherence to the policy of silence and distance during so many hours. He sat down by her and was silent for a minute, casting about in his mind for a safe and innocuous opening to conversation; then he embarked on mild and conciliatory remarks on the weather, and inquiries whether the change had affected her, whether she felt it chilly and would like another rug, &c. She only gave him monosyllabic answers; but he felt it was a distinct advance to be able to get into conversation with her at all. Presently, however, the constraint of the atmosphere became very freezing. He broke a somewhat embarrassing silence, which had lasted long enough to be growing more and more difficult to break, by saying, in that abrupt way which thinly disguises hesitation :

"Am I—intruding? I don't wish to force myself upon you. Will you please tell me when you wish me to leave you?"

For the first time since he had been on board he saw her lips part in a faint smile; not in the disdainful curve of bitter irony, but in a real involuntary smile of amusement, though very slight and cold. Indeed, she was mildly and coolly amused by his appeal, as she reflected that she had certainly not shown such tender consideration of his feelings that he need ask her not to scruple to dismiss him. His humility touched her a little, because there was nothing in the least abject in it; it was straightforward and honest, and honesty can never be abject.

"Will you do whatever I wish, then?" she rejoined, coldly and severely still, but less antagonistically now than heretofore.

"I will," he answered earnestly. "Only try me! I will do *anything* you desire! I swear to you on my honour I would throw myself overboard if you told me to do it!"

"That would be a brave way of getting out of a difficulty!" she said sardonically. Her thought as she said it was not quite literally translated in her words; what she was thinking was that if those brown eyes of his were not truthful, they ought to be, for if ever eyes had a straight, fearless, honest look, Ray Percival's had. Unconsciously she dropped her haughty and repellant air as she looked him full in the face.

"Do you not see now how wrongly you have acted towards me?" she said with severity and reproach still, but no longer with the scathing, galling scorn of yesterday.

"I do see it," he admitted. "What can I do?" he asked, not helplessly, but readily, ready to obey her least wish.

"Nothing at present, that I can see," she replied with a touch of bitterness.

"I am sorry," he said. "All I can say is that I never *meant* any offence to you. I have been wrong, I own, but it was a wrong of impulse, not of deliberate intent, and I am sorry—if you could know *how* sorry——"

"I know your being sorry cannot set the wrong right," she rejoined; "cannot set you where you ought to be—back in England!"

"No, unless I swim there," he said grimly, with a little bitter smile.

She did not suggest that he should make the attempt to surpass Leander's feat; and there was a brief silence, during which two passengers who were tramping steadily round and round the deck approached and passed—tall and strongly-built men, both of them; the one with a commonplace and middle-class air, the other peculiar-looking and even picturesque, with an aquiline profile, a flowing, grizzled beard, long hair, a brigandish-looking slouch hat, and large restless black eyes that rolled wildly hither and thither as he walked. This gentleman was leaning on the arm of the other, and muttering unceasingly to himself, without ever a glance or a word to his companion, who paced stolidly by his side.

"He's mad, poor fellow," Ray said in an undertone to Asenath as the pair went by.

"So are some people who go about without keepers," she rejoined severely. This remark, with its evidently intended reference to himself, recalled to Ray his grievance, which indeed lay so near his heart it did not need much to recall it.

"You mean me," he observed unnecessarily. "You—you would have hurt me less if the worst you accused me of had been madness! You don't know how you—you *stabbed* me last night by what you said—the last words you said to me."

"Whatever they were," she retorted, "you well deserved them!"

"I deserved to be rebuked perhaps," he replied hotly; "but I did *not* deserve to be accused of—of what you seemed to suspect"—he could allude no more nearly to the hateful insinuation that he had laid a deliberate design to compromise her.

"I can see no good to be gained by re-opening the discussion," she said stiffly. Then she suddenly added with a flash of re-kindled anger, "The more I think of it, the more deeply I must resent your outrageous conduct!"

"Don't be too hard on me," said Ray, stirred up to self-defence. "Haven't you punished me enough?"

"No, I have *not*!" she replied resolutely. "Can words punish *acts*?"

"I don't know," he muttered moodily. "I do know that I can bear no more, from even *you*."

No woman ever saw a man turn at bay, ready to break chain and defy her, without resorting to measures to bring him into subjection again, and the first measure generally assumes the form of a step in retreat from her dangerous position. Asenath saw as promptly as any of her sex that she must not drive Ray too far, if she wished to keep him within reach for further chastisement.

"You do not ask yourself," she said reproachfully still, but effecting a rapid descent from her lofty heights of resentment and rebuke, and meeting him fairly on level ground, "what *I* have to bear—the thought of the possible misinterpretations and aspersions to which you have exposed me, leaving me no power of explanation nor defence! Ask yourself how many people who heard of your following me in this manner to the other side of the world would believe that it was without consent or encouragement on my part? I am willing to believe that you acted on impulse, without deliberate design to injure me—but do you not see that the result is just the same to *me*?"

"I would rather cut my throat than be the cause of annoyance or trouble to *you*!" he replied, the blood surging in a wave of crimson up to his brow to the roots of his hair. "But no shadow of such annoyance—such false, ridiculous, impossible misinterpretation—shall come near you. I will take care of that!"

"Such a misinterpretation, however false, is neither ridiculous nor impossible, as you must know," she said. "And how will you 'take care' to prevent it?"

"No one knows that I am here," he suggested.

"And so you make me an accomplice in the secret of your crossing on this ship with me when you are supposed to be in Switzerland."

"Then tell the truth if you wish—and to whomsoever you wish," he answered recklessly. "Tell it or do not tell it; do what *you* think best! Your word shall be my law; I will say—will swear to—whatever you desire."

"I suppose I ought to thank you," she said with a curling lip. "for your offer to perjure yourself for me! But do you think I can forgive your having placed me in a position which makes such an offer possible?"

"I want to do all I can," he replied with a downcast look, half sullen, half appealing. "My only anxiety is to obey your lightest word. You have time to think of what your wishes are. When you let me know, I will obey to the uttermost."

"Yes, I have time to think. Meanwhile, we have talked long enough. Will you please to leave me now?"

"You have only to say the word," he answered, and obeyed.

But that evening he sought her again and asked if she would

not like to try a little walk. The vessel was rolling, but not so heavily as to prevent locomotion; the moon was rising brightly and shedding a flood of silver light on the waters.

Asenath at first declined his invitation in coldly polite and conventional form, as there were other passengers seated near, whose attention she did not wish to attract by any excessive acerbity of demeanour. From the same motive, as he lingered by her side, she vouchsafed brief replies to the conciliatory observations he addressed to her, and presently she consented to change her mind and take a walk on deck in the moonlight. Ray was delighted at this access of amiability on her part, but ice-cold water was very soon dashed upon his delight.

"I will take only just one turn," she said coldly and resolutely, as they stepped out of hearing of the group they had left behind, "and that only because I have a word to say to you."

"Yes?" he rejoined, all eagerness to hear it.

"It is only," she continued, "that this word must be the last! I must ask you not to come near me, nor talk to me, nor take any notice of me whatever henceforth!"

For she had begun to think seriously of the position, and the first result of her thinking was her perception that she had been unwise in letting herself drift into any conversation at all with Ray Percival—that even the administration of due reproaches and deserved rebukes must lead to a kind of appearance of intimacy. She had come to the conclusion that it must now be no question of friendly relations or inimical relations; there must simply be no relations at all between them. A salutary decision for both their interests, no doubt, but it fell on Ray like a *douche* of iced water, and almost took away his breath.

"You do not—you surely do not mean to forbid me to speak to you at all?" he protested.

"You promised you would obey my wishes," she replied.

"Yes, I did, I will! but any stranger may speak to you. You cannot mean to treat me worse than any stranger? Let me be only as a fellow passenger who has never seen you before—who meets you on this voyage for the first time!—but who surely is not forbidden to speak—to utter a common remark, to you! I will say nothing that the merest stranger might not say."

"I should have the privilege of refusing a stranger's acquaintance," she retorted. "I know I cannot compel you to obey my desire. I have no power to prevent you from forcing yourself upon me. You have placed me in such a position that I cannot appeal to the captain's protection against annoyance!"

"That's enough!" he interrupted in a deep, half-stifled voice. "No more—you've said enough!"

He could hardly speak; the passion of resentment almost choked him; he quivered from head to foot in such a storm of fury—the rage of love transformed in a flash to hate—as often turns a man

into a murderer ! At that moment he could have killed her ! He ground his teeth ; he felt fire mount to his brain, as if his brow would burst ! but with a mighty effort he managed to command himself, and even, after a minute, to find breath to speak again :

" You need dread no further persecution," he said hoarsely, and turned with a quick and determined step away from her.

The electric force of his suppressed passion had struck her into silence. A curious cold thrill fluttered her heart, that was more like *fear* than any feeling to which she was accustomed. She was in truth a little frightened at the storm she had raised ; she began to think she had gone too far.

Women love to exercise their power over men, as men love to subjugate or to slay the wild beasts of the field and forest. Just as there is a fierce pleasure in leaping on the untamed mustang, in breaking the furious, plunging creature in to the bridle—as the glorious moment of the boar-hunt is when the old tusker bursts through the bush, red fury in his small eyes, death in his savage gleaming tusks—so there is a native joy to woman in spurring, lashing, curbing and controlling the very force that may turn and destroy her ; and so her moment of triumph is when she realizes the full peril threatening her in the power she has raised !—and realizes too that she can slip aside—evade—escape from it !

But it is sometimes a dangerous triumph !

Asenath began to feel some misgivings as to the safety of driving Ray too far—to remember that it is always much easier to evoke the evil genie out of the jar than to get him in and cork him down again.

Presently, as she sat alone on the deck, the madman and his attendant passed her. The unfortunate man was leaning heavily and with dragging steps on his companion's arm, and looking up at the moon, shaking his head and muttering :

" Cold—cold—cold as death ! "

and he reiterated in a monotonous, moaning tone :

" Death—death—death ! "

Asenath's nerves must have been a little unstrung, for this gave her a cold and creepy, uncomfortable feeling ; she wished she were not alone ! even Ray's society would have been better than none ! She agreed sincerely with a remark made by a lady who was sitting in the companion way as she passed in :

" Doesn't it make one feel creepy to hear that poor fellow mumbling to himself ? "

" He ought to be kept shut up," observed another.

" It would be rather cruel to deprive him of fresh air and exercise," suggested Asenath. " And he is quite harmless, they say."

"Oh, of course they *say* so, but I am not quite so sure of it," rejoined the first speaker.

Asenath cast casual glances along the deck and into the saloon as she passed along, but she did not catch another glimpse of Ray Percival that evening, and she retired to her cabin with a disturbed and restless feeling, while he, sleepless with the bitter wrath of outraged love and wounded pride, was vowing never—never more to speak one word to her, nor even turn his eyes upon her face again! She should have no need to "appeal to the captain for protection from annoyance"—he flushed and clenched his teeth as he repeated the words to himself—no chance ever again of reiterating her accusation against him—that he compromised her, forced himself upon her! She had taunted, tortured him enough to punish his offence fifty-fold, he told himself resentfully; never should she have the opportunity of upbraiding him again!

The third day out was gloomy, cold and sunless; a grey sky lowered over a grey sea; the white horses rode on the crests of the waves; the vessel rose and sank slowly with the great deep swell of the rolling forties. The rolling forties were not doing their worst; but they were giving fair warning of what they *could* do if they were roused.

Most of the passengers were miserable. Ray Percival, although a first-rate sailor, was no exception to the general rule; even the worst sailors were scarcely more wretched than he, while Asenath, who kept fairly well in health, would have gladly changed places with the palest and haggardest of the invalided passengers whose ills at least were only those that the flesh, not the spirit, is heir to!

The morning passed, and Ray never came near her. Now and then she caught a glimpse of him in the distance, and knew that he could not fail to see her too; once even he passed within a few yards of her chair; and although he never turned his eyes towards her she felt that he was aware of her presence; but he gave no sign. The long slow dreary day dragged on, and he never came near; he was on deck a good deal, and so was she, but he never once approached within speaking distance of her.

The clouds did not lift; the sun did not show his face; the passengers' spirits drooped lower and lower as the grey sky seemed to brood down on the grey sea, and a drizzling rain began to fall. Asenath's mood was quite in keeping with the general depression. She endeavoured to assure herself that she was well satisfied with the success of her repulse of one whose unpardonable and outrageous conduct merited no milder measures than those which she had dealt to him.

She had successfully, triumphantly rid herself of him. It was well done; it was what she ought to have done before; she saw that now. But somehow the triumph seemed all turned "ashes to the taste;" there was no satisfaction in the success.

Asenath was accustomed to live her life to herself alone; but

seldom or never had the feeling of loneliness pressed upon her so heavily as now. The more she surveyed the position of affairs the more it troubled her. She shrank from the prospect of telling her husband of Ray Percival's following her to sea; yet she recoiled still more from the idea of concealing it. If Gervas Fitzallan had been another man, it would have been the easy, the natural, the only course, to confide in him, especially to Asenath, by nature honest and truthful, reserved but not secretive, hating dissimulation, and deeming prevarication as bad as falsehood.

But Fitzallan's was a character which even his wife did not thoroughly understand; the unknown always inspires something of dread; and Asenath's knowledge of her husband, so far as it went, disposed her to a certain undefinable fear of him—a fear which was rather instinctive than reasonable, as he had never shown her any unkindness. He had never manifested jealousy; indeed he had always trusted Asenath as one as true, if as cold, as steel; but she felt intuitively that if his jealousy should ever be roused, however wrongfully or mistakenly, she would have good cause for apprehension. Thus she was deeply troubled now by the position into which Ray Percival's reckless passion had forced her; and she felt it hard to bear her anxiety alone—to be debarred even from the small privilege of reproaching the cause of it. It might be but a slight satisfaction to visit her disquietude on him—to lash him with the scourge of bitter reproach—but still it was a little relief; and now by her own success in that last rebuff she had effectually deprived herself of that one poor satisfaction. That night every one retired early to rest, glad that the dreary Sunday was over; but the next day brought no great improvement in the weather; few people ventured on deck, and even Asenath did not get out of her cabin till late. The day passed, and she heard nothing, saw nothing of Ray. In the evening the wind and rain abated; the motion of the vessel was quieter; a feeble moon was endeavouring to peep between the clouds; and some of the passengers proposed cheering themselves and their neighbours by a little music in the saloon. It looked more cheerful there than outside; the lamps were lighted, the damp drizzle and darkness shut out. The sound of music soon drew an audience; the saloon quickly filled, as even the sea-sick people crept in languidly to listen. After a soprano lady and a meek young man with a feeble tenor had sung, somebody asked Mrs. Fitzallan to favour them. As she went to the piano she caught a passing glimpse of a figure that looked like Ray Percival's, amongst a little group of listeners who were standing round the open door; and some impulse moved her to choose out of her *répertoire* what Rhoda called the "Robin Song." As her clear voice rang out the sparkling opening notes:

' Have you trimmed your coat this morning,
My Robin over the street? "

Ray almost started as he looked up. Quickly, as a flash, it bore him back in spirit to his home, a thousand miles and more away—the sweet home of love and peace. He saw her, Asenath, there amongst his own people, as but a few weeks ago he had seen her, looking up from the piano to smile at him with calm, friendly eyes. Now, although half a dozen steps would have taken him to her side, she seemed further from him than if the ocean had rolled between them!

He little thought that in spirit she too had fled back over those thousand miles of sea—she, too, was there in that rose-shaded, flower-fragrant drawing-room, in the calm of the summer evening.

“O, Robin, strive,
If yet alive,
To cry him mercy, too,
And peace for me and you, Robin,
Deux enfants perdus!”

What mercy had she had on *him*? What peace was for *him*? Yet, as he listened, the bitterness at his heart suddenly and strangely softened into an anguish of tenderness and yearning and regret; then the violent wrath of love again swept back on him like a flood, and surged over those softer feelings. He hated her for the sweet voice that had stabbed him with cruel taunts—for the soft thrilling tones that turned to ice and steel for *him*.

“The day is past;
The die is cast;
Love perished where it grew!”

In an access of indignant passion and pain he told himself that that last line was true! but told the lie in vain. Love had not perished! Wounded, but not weakened, it waxed to renewed strength. And well for *him*, indeed, would it have been had the day been past on whose very dawn the lurid storm-clouds lowered!

Presently, glancing round, he saw at his elbow the two figures now familiar to all on board—the insane passenger, Mr. Stapleton, and his attendant, the former listening intently to the song, and for once not murmuring to himself according to his habit. Ray had seldom stood so close to the unfortunate man; and looking at him now he was unpleasantly struck by the expression of his eyes. When the song was over, the attendant led his charge away.

“Poor fellow!” remarked one of the other passengers who stood by; “that’s a sad sight to see, sir, isn’t it?”

“Sad, indeed,” Ray assented.

“The wreck of a fine intellectual mind!” the other added. “I was talking to the keeper, and he tells me the poor fellow was a man of great talent and high education.”

“How does the voyage affect him?” asked Ray. “Is he any the better for it?”

"Well, it seems to *me*," lowering his voice to a confidential tone, "by what Jackson, the keeper, tells me, that he is rather the worse—but Jackson says he is always excited about the full of the moon. He is pretty quiet to day, and I think he enjoyed the music—you could see how intently he was listening."

"Yes," Ray agreed. "There's a look about his eyes I don't quite like," he added, as much to himself as to his companion, who replied with a reassuring air of superior knowledge :

"Oh, he's all right and harmless enough, poor fellow ! only now and then he goes off and raves about religion, sometimes dresses up an altar and says he's the High Priest !"

Ray lingered about the door of the saloon until the impromptu concert was over. He adhered resolutely, in spite of sundry sharp twinges of temptation, to the course of conduct he had marked out for himself, and neither went in to the saloon nor waited on the threshold to see Asenath as she passed out, but ascended to the deck and had a solitary smoke, after which he retired to his cabin. Most of the passengers had also retired ; the saloon was empty, the companion-way deserted ; he had left two or three people still up on deck, and amongst them, although he did not know it, was Asenath, who had gone up for a breath of fresh air before seeking her night's rest.

Ray had been fortunate enough to secure a cabin to himself, as the steamer was not overcrowded, so he had no room-mate to intrude on his privacy.

He was in no hurry for sleep ; indeed, for the last few nights sleep had only visited him by fits and snatches. He sat thinking—or rather letting his troubled thoughts come and go, sweeping like dark, hurrying storm-clouds through his mind—for some minutes ; then he was just reflecting that, sleep or no sleep, he might as well lie down as sit up, when the silence—hitherto only broken by the thud of the engines and creak of straining timbers—was suddenly and startlingly shattered by a woman's shriek—a wild scream for help.

Ray leapt to his feet as if he had been shot. The blood curdled ice-cold about his heart ; for that cry was in Asenath's voice, and he knew her well enough to know that nothing but mortal danger would wring such a shriek for help from *her* lips.

Quick as lightning, even as he threw himself out of his cabin, his imagination had pictured the worst ; he knew what had happened ; he felt in a flash as if he should have foreseen this horror all along ! He knew—knew before he saw it—that the lunatic had broken into frenzy and had attacked *her*. His brain reeled, his pulse stood still, as he saw her struggling to free herself from the madman's arm, which held her as if in a vice—saw the gleam of a knife flash in the air—saw in the man's eyes that look which once seen can never be forgotten, the unhuman glare of homicidal mania !

As the unfortunate Stapleton had sprung upon her and raised the knife, she had caught with both hands at his lifted arm and so for the moment averted the blow. Her slender hands were still clutching his wrist with the force of desperation ; but it was clear, as she bent like a willow in his grasp, that her woman's feeble strength would not hold out for half a minute against his. But in the instant that Ray saw her horrible peril, he sprang to save her. The madman was facing him, and there was neither room in the narrow passage, nor a second of time to spare, to make a rush round so as to seize and disarm him from behind. With one tiger leap Ray hurled himself between Asenath and her assailant. Neither he nor she could ever tell how it was that he fairly tore her from Stapleton's grasp ; only he felt that "his strength was as the strength of ten" as he wrested her away, and grappled with the hand that held the knife.

It was a thing like a wild-beast, not a human being, with which he closed in a life-and-death struggle. Ray was young and strong ; but his opponent had the fearful strength of frenzy, and was possessed solely by the mad craving to kill. He did not strive to free himself from Ray ; he only sought to stab—to kill him. And the man who only struggled to master and disarm his opponent, was ill-matched against the creature, no longer human, whose whole being was but one wild, savage blood-thirst and rage to slay.

This had all passed in a moment ; but Ray felt, even as he wrenched the armed hand aside and evaded one blow, that if help did not come in another moment, it was a toss-up whether it would not come too late for *him* ! And in that moment help *was* coming. Asenath's scream and the sound of scuffling had raised the alarm. Already men were running to the spot ; terrified women were shrieking hysterically at their cabin doors ; one holding back her husband, who proposed to rush to the rescue. Asenath had not fled when she was released ; she stood there still without a word, without a cry, as if paralyzed, looking on at the two men who were locked and entangled in so close a grapple it seemed but one struggling mass that swayed to and fro.

The keeper rushed upon the scene, but before he could reach the spot the knife in Stapleton's hand was crimsoned, and Ray's strength was failing fast ; his breath came in quick heavy gasps ; but he held on with a grip like a bull-dog's, closed fast and tight in the struggle, until the keeper seized and mastered the lunatic's right hand. Then, while two other men hurried to the keeper's assistance, Ray's strained muscles suddenly lost their force ; he staggered back and leant against the wall for support, a stream of blood trickling fast over his shoulder and breast.

"You are hurt ?" said Asenath in a low breathless cry.

"Not much," he replied panting. With an instinctive gesture, he stretched his arm out as if to interpose a barrier between her

and the desperate scuffle which was going on ; three to one ! but the madman's furious force was almost a match for the united strength of the three ; and in the struggle he was dragging them towards Ray and Asenath.

"Too close—keep back—keep away," Ray warned her in broken gasps. He caught her arm as if to lead or push her on ; but suddenly his hand relaxed its hold ; he reeled, and went down with a crash on the floor at her feet. She knelt beside him and tried to raise him ; a cold shudder of sickening terror shook her as his head sank back lifelessly over her arm, and she felt her hand red-wet with the blood that was welling faster and faster—she could not see for that crimson flow where was the wound from which it gushed.

"Where is the doctor ?" she exclaimed.

"Here !" came the prompt answer, as the ship's surgeon hurried to her side.

The three men, now aided by a fourth, had mastered the unfortunate Stapleton, had got the knife from him, pinioned him, and were dragging him away, while he foamed at the mouth and gnashed his teeth like a wild-beast foiled of his prey. And now the crowd who had hitherto kept at a safe distance, came swarming round.

"Stand clear ! let him have air !" ordered the doctor, bending down close over Ray to examine the wound, and cutting the clothing away from it with his penknife.

"Is it dangerous ?" asked Asenath, still kneeling by his side.

"Humph—can't be quite sure yet. We had better get him to his cabin and I'll attend to it there."

Willing hands helped to convey the wounded man to his room ; an eager group hung about in the passage outside. Two or three women were crying, one sobbing as hysterically as if she had a deep personal interest in the affair. Asenath, although very pale, was the most self-possessed and collected of them all. Some, having let off the steam of their first excitement, drifted away without waiting for the doctor's report ; others remained, telling and re-telling the tale, of which already various versions were started. Few who had not witnessed the whole scene, realized Asenath's part in it ; when she was identified as the heroine of the occasion she was surrounded with questions and sympathy and offers of restoratives. She was quiet and monosyllabic ; all her soul was concentrated in sickening suspense, as she waited to know whether he who had snatched her from the very jaws of death had saved her life at the cost of his own. For he had looked so ghastly pale as he lay insensible, as if it was indeed his life-blood that was ebbing away !

When at last the doctor came out of the cabin, her lips quivered so that she had some difficulty in controlling her voice as she made her inquiries.

"He'll do," said the surgeon cheerfully; he was a young and enthusiastic practitioner and quite enjoyed the case. "There's an ugly gash right across the shoulder—laid bare the collar-bone—but a clean cut," he added, as if he rather relished descanting upon it; "and there's a small incised wound where the fellow tried to stab him and the knife glanced off the breast-bone. He's lost a good deal of blood, and that and the shock have exhausted him considerably; but he has come off uncommonly well: if the knife had gone half-an-inch further, it would have been all up with him; he must have bled to death. He wanted to know how *you* were, Mrs. Fitzallan; and I told him you were all right. How are you feeling now? Any the worse for the fright?"

"None the worse, thank you. Of course it gave me a turn for the moment," she replied with her usual calmness.

"Of course. You have good nerve, Mrs. Fitzallan," he observed with a touch of semi-professional admiration in his tone. "Half the other women on this ship would have been in howling hysterics all night if they had been in *your* place."

"I am not very hysterical," said Asenath with a faint smile. But when she was safely shut in her cabin that night, secure in her seclusion, she broke down and cried as she had never cried before in all her life. She stifled her sobs and wept silently, so that no sound should betray her; but the tears poured like rain down her face, and she trembled from head to foot in a storm of emotion.

"What *has* come to me?" she asked herself when the passion of tears began to calm down. "I always had such steady nerve. I have often seen people hurt and wounded—I never felt that cold sick shudder at the sight of blood before. But—it never before was shed for me! He might have been killed. I thought he *was* killed, there before my eyes. And I have been very hard on him," and at this thought she broke down again, and buried her face in the pillow to smother her sobs.

CHAPTER XIII

FORGIVEN.

"That only touch—that feeling only,
 Enough we found! we found too much!
 For the unlit shrine is hardly lonely,
 As that the old fire forgets to touch!"

"AHA, Mrs. Fitzallan!" exclaimed the captain, hailing her jovially as she came on deck the next day; "good morning! I'm glad to see you looking quite yourself again. Why, you're the heroine of the day! Here's the doctor just been singing your praises—says he wishes all his patients were like you."

"But all the same I am very glad that Mrs. Fitzallan has escaped being a patient to-day," said the doctor smiling.

"Thanks to Mr. Percival, wasn't it?" observed the blunt captain, whose way was to speak out his mind.

"It was, indeed," replied Asenath. "Tell me, doctor, how is he to-day?"

"Going on all right. He must keep quiet, and lie as still as possible; but he won't stay in his berth; so the captain has very kindly taken him to his own room."

"Where he can lie on the sofa, and it's airy and comfortable. He's been asking for you, Mrs. Fitzallan," added the captain, "and perhaps you'd like to go in and see him, and sit with him a little while, and cheer him up, and keep him quiet?"

"Certainly I will," she assented with placid readiness. "Am I to let him talk, doctor?"

"If he likes."

"Indeed you may depend on it, he *will* if he likes," laughed the captain.

"So long as he doesn't get excited," added the doctor.

"And how is that unfortunate—Mr. Stapleton?" asked Mrs. Fitzallan, who did not intend to hurry to Mr. Percival's side too speedily. She paled a little as she half-reluctantly uttered the name of the unhappy and irresponsible creature who had so nearly been her murderer, or Ray's.

"In a strait jacket; raving! You needn't have any fear, Mrs. Fitzallan—there's no more danger from *him*; he's shut up under strict watch and ward! That fellow Jackson ought never to have left him for a moment!" the captain's genial face darkened. "It's a disgrace, an outrage, that such a thing should have been allowed to happen. It seems he managed to get Jackson out of the way on an errand—with the cunning of madness. Jackson says he's never broken out as badly as this before since he's had charge of him. He's under the delusion now that he's the High Priest, and must sacrifice a human victim on the altar—that was his idea last night; and he's still raving about it to-day!"

"He very nearly had two victims," said Asenath gravely.

After a few minutes' more conversation she observed, "Well, I think I may as well go and see how Mr. Percival is getting on now," and the captain and the doctor escorted her to the captain's room, which was indeed an airy and comfortable little apartment on deck, well furnished and with two good-sized windows. Here on a sofa Ray was lying, covered up with a striped blanket. He did not look very ill, for his face was a little flushed and his dark eyes looked large and bright.

"Here's Mrs. Fitzallan come to see you," the captain announced in his big jovial voice. The flush deepened on Ray's cheek, and a light of pleasure leapt in his eyes.

"It is very good of her," he said gratefully.

"Are you better?" she asked gently, taking his hand, which closed on hers eagerly and held it so fast she could not disengage it without betraying an effort.

"Yes—much better."

"*Getting* better," the doctor corrected him. "Now, Mrs. Fitzallan, here's the captain's own comfortable chair; and if you like to sit with my patient a little while, I give my consent—only don't let him talk too much."

Then the captain and the doctor departed, to Ray's infinite delight, leaving him alone with Asenath.

There was a moment's silence; he had released her hand directly he felt it seeking to slip out of his. She was looking at him with a gentle serious kindness—calmly still, but not coldly now.

"It was good of you to come," he repeated.

"I was anxious to see for myself how you are," she said.

She wanted to thank him for the life she owed to him, but words seemed so poor and tame; and it was generally hard for Asenath, except under stress of great excitement, to express her feelings in words. She only asked him in a still kinder and gentler tone: "Are you in any pain?"

"No—not unless I move, and nothing to speak of then. But *you*—are you well? are you not suffering from the shock of last night?"

"No, I am quite well," she replied.

With an involuntary unconscious gesture of tender solicitude, he had stretched his hand towards her in his anxious inquiry; and with an equally involuntary revolt against her own apparent coolness—a reactionary impulse against the impassiveness which so ill translated her real feelings of gratitude—she laid her fingers lightly on his.

"You are a little feverish," she said softly.

"I suppose I am," he admitted; "at least I *was*, in the small hours this morning."

"Could you not sleep?" she asked in the same sympathetic tone.

"No—I kept thinking of—all sorts of things." Drawn on by her gentle kindness to speak out his thoughts, he added, "I was wondering—if that fellow had dug his knife in half an inch deeper—who would have told the mater? my mother, you know. I'm afraid she'd take it badly if anything happened to me."

"Yes; she idolizes you, one can see that," said Asenath a little sadly. No one idolized *her*; and these Percivals, with their warm and demonstrative affections, always made her feel a thrill of half-envious sadness.

"I wish I was better worth it," said Ray simply. "You have made me feel a worthless, good-for-nothing sort of fellow altogether."

"I did not mean to be too hard upon you," she said.

"I deserved it," he rejoined, ready enough to reproach himself when *she* did not.

"Yes," she assented quietly, "you did; but——" The soft lingering last syllable was eloquent.

"But you—you speak as if you'd forgiven me now?"

"It would be rather curious if I had *not*," she replied with a singular smile on her lips, "considering that but for you there would be no *me* here to forgive you. I am afraid," she added slowly and with an effort, "you must think me cold—hard—ungrateful——"

"I think you are an angel," he said, carrying her hand to his lips and kissing it with a passionate yet reverent tenderness she could not resent. She drew it away, but not angrily.

"You *do* forgive me—*all*?" he entreated, clinging to the cool white fingers as they slid from his, yet not trying to detain them against her will.

"We will let bygones be bygones," she answered. "At least, until——"

"Until," he said, "until when? You are not going to retract your pardon—to put me on the rack again?"

"I have said," she rejoined slowly and steadfastly, "let bygones rest—for the present. Before the voyage is over, I shall be compelled to refer, once more and only once, to a painful subject; but we will *not* allude to it now. Let there be peace between us."

"May it never be broken again!" he said earnestly. "It never shall be by any fault of mine."

"Do not protest too much," she replied with her sweet subtle smile.

He smiled too, a happy, lingering smile, as his eyes dwelt on her face. Just at that moment it seemed to him that Asenath's forgiveness—Asenath's presence there alone by his side—Asenath's smile and her gentle sympathy—made up the sum of all he could desire. This was pure happiness—happiness enough even to compensate him for the past few days. But this contented mood might possibly last about half-an-hour, before inevitably breaking up in the restless fever of unsatisfied love.

Asenath did not intend to let the conversation continue in too personal a strain; so she tried to turn it into a safer channel by remarking what a comfortable room the captain had, and how kind and hearty and good the captain was; but somehow from the captain's cabin and the captain's virtues they came round, by natural way of the captain's orders as to the strict confinement of the unhappy maniac, to some allusion to the event of the previous night.

"May I ask you—how was it? how did it happen? or would it upset you to tell me?" he said.

"I was going along the passage towards my room when he sprang out upon me suddenly, like a wild beast. It was all as quick as a flash. I remember catching at his hand to keep the knife away. But I knew I had no chance against him. I thought it was all over with me—when *you*—came!"

Ray shuddered and turned white at the mere recollection.

"It was too horrible!" he said. "I would not for all the world go through that moment again—when I saw you—and was afraid I might be too late."

The memory of that terrible minute turned her pale too.

"We must not talk of it," he added with quick sympathetic perception; "don't think of it any more. Thank Heaven! you are all right, and so am I."

But Asenath was for the moment living that horror over again; and her ordinary cool self-control was a little shaken.

"I thought he would kill you," she said involuntarily.

"And did you care?" he exclaimed with a flush of passionate eagerness mounting to his brow.

She shrank back into the shelter of her habitual reserve with an instinct of alarm, too vague for her to be sure whether she was afraid of herself or of him.

"I have heard of Spanish women enjoying bull-fights," she replied quietly; "but I don't think as a rule that women of my race find it an agreeable experience to see—any one—killed—before their eyes."

"Of course; I understand," he said with a gloomy reaction. "It would have been just the same if it had been any one else. It was only disagreeable to your nerves to see it."

"My nerves are not generally very obtrusive," she answered coldly. Then she added with her best impersonal air, as nurse addressing patient:

"The doctor said you were not to talk too much. You have been talking quite enough. I will leave you now, and you had better try to get a little sleep."

"No, no; don't go," he pleaded eagerly as she rose. "I don't want to sleep; I couldn't sleep. Do, do stay."

He sprang up from his pillows, and put out his hand to detain her.

"Now really you are a very naughty boy," she said in the tone maternal, three quarters earnest and one part playful. "Were you not told to lie quiet? You must *not* move, or that wound might break out bleeding again. If you wish me to stay with you a little longer—well, it depends on yourself."

"Then you *will* stay," he rejoined. "I won't say anything more that you need mind; I won't indeed!" He added as she returned to her seat, "I could tell you nothing that you don't know," and his eyes pointed the words, which, however, she calmly ignored.

"I admire such unusual modesty in one of your noble sex," she observed, seeking a light and bantering tone as a refuge from personality. "You give me credit for greater knowledge than I possess. I am not a walking cyclopædia, and I dare say you could impart a good deal of information to me."

She was determined to keep in shallow waters now, and she worked steadily, pursuing a beaver-like course, building up barriers across the stream, piling obstacles in the way of the conversation's flowing back into the deep and dangerous channel of serious personality.

Whether she would have succeeded for very long is open to question. Anyhow she was successful in keeping the safe smooth shallows until the door swung open as if by a gust of strong wind, and the captain's burly form filled the doorway, and his voice the room, as he hailed them with an inquiry as to how the nurse and patient were getting along, demanding of Mrs. Fitzallan: "Is he a very troublesome boy?" and of Mr. Percival, "Has she kept a tight hand on you, and made you swallow all kinds of messes, as women always do?"

That Tuesday Ray wished that the voyage were a longer one; wished it were not the narrowest part of the Atlantic they were crossing; reflected with regret that they were due in Quebec at the end of the week. Asenath came to him, sat by him, talked to him in soft and friendly tones. Others of his fellow-passengers also came to inquire after him, and were very attentive, and indeed made rather a hero of him. That was not unpleasant; but the happiness was in Asenath's kindly smile, in the gentle light of her clear eyes. He was at peace with her—forgiven, and life for him stood still that day. He did not look forward to a morrow; he saw no future; he wrapt himself in the present. The past and the future, and all beyond and beside this day, the world they had left behind, the world for which their sails were set—all were to him as if blotted out.

They were friends once more, he and Asenath—that was all his thought; and he was careful to hold himself in strict command, and not by any rash word, or even betraying look, to startle her back into her cold reserve; and all was peace that day.

The next day was not quite so pleasant, for during the night they had run into rougher weather, and in the morning it was, as even the captain admitted, "a bit squally." The clouds lowered darker and heavier, the wind and waves rose higher and higher as the hours wore on. Ray had hardly slept all night for the rolling of the vessel, which rendered lying still in one position impossible, while the perpetual motion chafed and irritated the wound in his shoulder, and gave him a great deal of pain. He felt much worse on rising, and was barely able to get up to the deck-room, which

the captain had again kindly placed at his disposal for the day. The doctor was against Mr. Percival's leaving his berth at all, and indeed Ray was almost too ill to move; but he wanted to be within reach of Asenath. She came to see him as before; but the day was so rough and gloomy, and he was so evidently worse, that it cast a cloud over them both. Still he found it sweet to have her sitting beside him, to meet her eyes bent kindly and anxiously on his face. He did not mind the throbbing pain and feverish weakness while she was by his side. The vessel was rolling so heavily that every now and then he had to clutch the sides of the sofa to save himself from being thrown on the floor, while Asenath had to hold on to the window-sill to keep herself and her chair from being shot across the room.

Late in the day the captain came and recommended that Mr. Percival should go downstairs to his own cabin, as the waves were breaking over the deck and he would probably feel the motion less below. Ray consented the more readily because Asenath had already gone down, and thus he had no motive for remaining upstairs. The doctor insisted on his getting straight into his berth, and told him to try and sleep. But this was much more easily said than done. Between the rolling of the vessel and physical discomfort and mental disturbance, his brain quickened, and excited by his bodily condition, he lay wakeful, restless, tossing and turning, a prey to troubled thought. And so the dreary evening wore away and the dark and stormy night closed in and dragged on tediously; and at last Ray dropped into an uneasy doze from pure exhaustion, but soon awoke again.

In the dead of the night he was lying listening to the creak and groan of the straining timbers, the heavy wash of the waves, the thud of the engines, when he was startled by a tremendous crash, beneath which the great ship shuddered like a living creature shot. Then there was a rattling and clattering noise—it sounded to his feverish fancy as if a thousand fiends were clanking their chains in chorus—and the vibrations of the engines stopped—stopped dead.

There was something awful in the sudden cessation of the throb and pulse of the vessel, which but now had seemed a living thing, her iron heart beating firm and true as the vital power within her sped her on her steady course through the shocks of the assailing billows. She lay now like the same creature slain, rolling helpless, lifeless, a dead weight on the waves.

It was pitch dark; he could see nothing, not even the pale gleam of the porthole. He heard the cries of frightened women, a hubbub of shouts, questions and commands; then the thunder of water sweeping overhead as a great sea burst upon the decks, beneath which the whole vessel shook and reeled.

Something had happened; something serious; the crash, the stopping engines, the thunder above! Ray flung himself out of

his berth, groped for his clothes, hurried them on, and felt for the door in the black darkness that seemed to wrap close round him like a pall.

He could not find the door-latch; and as he groped for it, a deadly faintness and dizziness came over him. The exertion had caused the unhealed wounds to break out bleeding again; he felt the warm gush trickling down his breast; the momentary strength restored to him by sudden excitement failed as suddenly. He staggered, catching the wall to support himself, and gasping for breath. His head swam and whirled. Where was the door? the handle? Was he shut in here to die in a trap? He tried to call out for some one to open the door, but voice and breath failed him; the vessel was heeling over to one side so that he lost his footing, felt himself falling—falling; his head struck violently against some sharp corner, and he rolled on to the floor stunned and, for a few minutes, unconscious.

The next thing of which he was sensible was that some one was trying to lift him up, calling him by name—by the name he had not heard since he left his home:

“Ray—Ray! come, rouse yourself!”

Then a magnetic consciousness ran through him like an electric shock; he knew who was kneeling by him in the thick darkness, on whose arm his head rested, whose dear voice was calling him by the name he had never dared to hope to hear from her lips; and even in that moment of unknown peril the consciousness vibrated through every nerve with a rapturous thrill.

“You? is it you?” he gasped. “What—what has happened?”

“I knocked,” she replied in hurried, broken accents; “you did not answer, so I came in to fetch you. There is some accident to the ship—I don’t know what it is. Can you get on deck?”

“Yes, yes,” he said, and with a desperate effort struggled to his feet, clutching the sofa and the wall to avoid resting his weight on her as she helped him to rise. Her presence was like an elixir of new strength to him; he fought down the faintness and giddiness that almost disabled him, and they made their way out into the passage, along which other alarmed passengers were swarming. The lamps out, only one feeble light was flickering near the foot of the stairs; they could barely distinguish the dusky figures moving, hurrying around them, whose voices they heard raised in a confusion of excited inquiries—“Is it a collision?” “An explosion?” “What is it?”

So heavy was the rolling of the vessel as she swung lifelessly in the trough of the waves that they had to lean against the wall and to cling to each other for mutual support. They managed to get as far as the foot of the companion-way; and there, just as Ray put his hand on the balustrade, his foot on the first stair, a

huge wave broke and burst like thunder on the deck and rushed down the staircase. They saw in the dusky half-light the pale flash of water—huge and spectral it looked—and all the weight of the roaring wave leapt upon them and drenched them and swept them staggering backwards. The last flicker of the swinging lamp went out; the shrieks of terrified women rose above the roar of the water.

Ray had his arm round Asenath to help her up the stairs, and as the sea dashed upon their faces, took away their breath, blinded them, deafened them, and hurled them back against the wall—and the vessel, reeling under the shock, lay over on her beam-ends till it seemed impossible she could ever right again—they both thought their last hour had come! And in that moment, when it seemed to them that the supreme crisis was upon them and the die was cast for life or death, he caught her closer and pressed her to his heart, with the one thought, that if they must indeed die now, at least they would die together; he would hold her fast until the end, in an embrace that would never relax while a throb of life was in him! And in that moment she clung to him and her head drooped on his breast.

It was not so much to him individually as to the nearest, the only near human love, she clung. For if this were death, it would be horrible to drown alone, and she sank by blind instinct into the arms that would clasp her close in death itself.

But not for these two were death and peace allotted yet. Through the darkness, as the falling water washed round their feet, but left them free to breathe and live, and through the frightened cries and sobs of women, they heard a strong, confident voice proclaiming:

"Come, come, quiet here! She's not going down. The 'Sicilian's' weathered worse nights than this. It's a nasty night, and she's shipped a pretty heavy sea, and some fool's opened the door and let the water down, and that's all. Now, ladies, there's no good to be done by crying. There's no need for alarm. I've been through many a worse night than this. Now let's have a little light and stop this hullabaloo."

Before the cheery voice had finished speaking, Asenath had broken from Ray's arms and slipped away from his side. The vessel, which had heeled over until her gunwale dipped under water, now slowly righted; somebody re-lit the lamp, and in its feeble flicker Ray saw Asenath a few steps off, leaning against the wall, with her hands up to her brow clearing from her eyes the wet and loosened hair, which streamed over her face like a dripping veil. The doctor came upon the scene just then, dropping encouraging and soothing words as he passed from group to group:

"Don't cry, Mrs. O'Brien; don't be frightened. What, Mr.

Williamson, your wife in hysterics, eh? Mrs. Fitzallan, *you're* all right? Keep a level head on your shoulders, as usual. Now, Mr. Percival, you'd better go back to your room. Why, this gash has broken out bleeding again, I see. Come, it's no use your keeping about; there's no need to sit up."

"What is the matter in the engine-room?" asked Ray.

"A break in the machinery. The engineers are down now inspecting it; they'll set it right as soon as possible."

When Ray looked round again for Asenath she had vanished. As soon as she realized there was no present danger, she had slipped quickly away. In the dim light and the confusion and crowd he could not see where she was; he only saw that she was gone.

Daylight came, and matters looked less gloomy, inasmuch as the sea was not running quite so high, the motion was a trifle less violent, and although the machinery was still silent and the vessel rolled like a dead log on the waves, the report was that the accident was not a serious one, and the engineers were set to work repairing the damage.

The first cold, pale sunbeams which stole through the portholes into the saloon threw a light on a number of chilly and disconsolate-looking people, huddled about in more or less dishevelled groups, some silent, some dozing, some relating their former adventures by flood and field. A few had felt sufficiently reassured to return to their berths, but the majority, seeking companionship in adversity, had gathered together either in the little so-called "ladies' boudoir" or in the saloon, where the stewards had by this time mopped up the water from the floor. Among the silent and shivering ones in the saloon was Ray Percival, but not Mrs. Fitzallan; of her he had not caught a glimpse since she slipped from his side when it was announced that there was no cause for fear. The daylight was streaming in broad and bright before he saw her again. She came to the door of the saloon and cast a glance round, and her eyes fell on Ray. If he had been looking fairly well she would probably not have gone near him, but in truth he presented just then rather a haggard and miserable aspect; he was white and worn as if from weeks of illness, and shaken by violent fits of shivering, in spite of being huddled up under a rug. And then as he caught sight of her his eyes lit up with such a gleam of pleasure, that her heart smote her it would be too cruel to pass on and turn away from him without a word.

"Where have you been all this time?" he asked as she came to his side, and an unconscious touch of reproach as well as of anxiety betrayed itself in his tone.

"Subduing Mrs. Williamson's hysterics; sitting with poor little Mrs. O'Brien; comforting the Danvers girls."

"It has seemed such a long time, and I have wanted so much to see you—to thank you——"

"For what?" she rejoined quickly, shrinking a little away, while the first vivid blush he had ever seen on her face suffused it suddenly scarlet from throat to brow—the painful flush of shame, alarm and embarrassment. Could it be possible that he was going to remind her of the moment when she had flung herself upon his breast? His next words reassured her.

"For your angelic goodness in coming to fetch me—to call me—at the first alarm." He had noted her blush, and, with the quick sympathy of his sensitive perceptions, averted his eyes to spare her from feeling his notice of it.

"I thought you might be worse," she said in a tone of calm explanation, which nevertheless betrayed a certain eagerness to set the matter quite clear. "You had been looking so bad all day, I was afraid you might not be able to get on deck, and it seemed to me that some one ought to—to call you."

"You would not leave me to drown and die like a rat in a hole!" he said, and his dark eyes flashed straight into hers.

"You did not leave *me* to die on Monday night," she retorted, and for the moment her eyes met his without shrinking, with a steady glow in their clear depths. Only for a moment, then she drew back a little further from him.

"When that great wave broke over us on the stairs," she said "I thought the ship was going down."

"I know you did," he said briefly, a little bitterly. Did he not know too well that if she had not fancied at the moment that it was all over with them she would never so have clung to him! "I thought it was all up with us too," he added quietly; and Asenath knew by woman's unerring instinct then that she need never fear a word or look of his reminding her intentionally of that episode.

"You are chilly and shivering," she observed practically, glad to take refuge in such plain matter-of-fact observations.

"But my hands and head are burning," he replied. She laid her own cool fingers lightly on his and found that it was true.

"You had better get into your berth," she said. "You ought to have gone back to your cabin at once and lain there quiet all these hours. Why did you not?"

"I had enough of it. I felt as if I was being stifled in my coffin when I was shut in there, and couldn't find the door to get out."

"You must get rid of that fancy, for your berth is the best place for you. You have not changed your wet clothes?"

"No; have *you*?"

"No; but *I* am well, and sea-water won't hurt me. Now I shall send one of the stewards or somebody to you."

And she went away and found the doctor, and asked him to go and see to Mr. Percival, whom the doctor forthwith ordered instantly to his berth.

(To be continued.)

THE HOUSE OF WITTELSBACH.

By BARBARA HUTTON.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART II.

IF the last four Bavarian princes appreciated and patronised art (Max Joseph, who died in 1825, beginning the embellishment of Munich; his son, Lewis the First, adding to it till it became the famous "Modern Athens" that it is; Maximilian the Second, the friend of science and literature, as well as of art, following in both their steps, and leaving the National Gallery and street bearing his name behind him as a record of his life) the last king, Lewis the Second, seems to have cared less for painting or sculpture in comparison with their sister art, music. That unfortunate prince will be chiefly recollected as the patron of Wagner. Only nineteen when he ascended the throne, tall, handsome and capable, with a manly determination in his eye, his subjects (dejected at the sudden death of his father) saw in him the image of an ideal prince. The memory of this ill-fated monarch is often misjudged. In England and out of his own country he is merely spoken of as a madman and suicide; but I have met people of position in Munich who describe him (before his illness) as well endowed with intellectual powers and, in short, a man of good capacity. As a proof of this, they remind one that he was the unflinching upholder of German unity under an empire, and the first prince to acknowledge the King of Prussia as Emperor.

He did not withdraw his friendship from Dr. Döllinger, when that famous man fell under Rome's displeasure. He also saw rocks ahead, long in advance of other German powers, before the Franco-German war began; and he recognized the genius of Richard Wagner in 1864, sending for him to Munich and giving him the opportunity Genius needs before it becomes famous. Music and poetry were the things dearest to Lewis the Second's heart; but at the beginning of his reign he had honest and sincere aspirations for the welfare of his people, and there is something generous in the love that his memory still inspires in their hearts.

It was perhaps his fate that stirs their souls even now when a stranger speaks of him. The Germans, with all their smoke, slowness and heaviness, have a great deal of romance in their nature.

The image of a young king isolating himself from all society, giving himself up to the study of the Ideal, as he read it in the pages of his favourite Schiller, or recognized it in the pathos of melody, appealed to their imaginations, and his fate to their intensest sympathies.

That he was one with his subjects on the subject of loyal adherence to Prussia in its hour of need at the beginning of the war with France was evident one evening at that period.

There had been a stormy debate in the Chamber of Deputies. The large sum demanded for military purposes had been opposed. At length the patriotic party conquered. It was night when the sitting broke up. A large crowd assembled under the king's window. They sang the German national air; the king threw open his window and leant out, his head bare, enthusiasm in his eyes. "Hoch" after "hoch" resounded in the clear cold air. Lewis was at one with his people, who were for war.

Unfortunately, as time went on, after the war was over signs that all was not well manifested themselves. He began to shun society. He sought entire solitude; chiefly in the spots he loved most to seek it in, among the mountains of the Bavarian highlands, farther and farther away from the noise and glitter of a court residence.

The court ceased to exist. It was very hard on the capital, which the king never visited except at rare intervals, while every year that passed by his intense passion for solitude seemed to grow upon him. To this solitude and the love of it came illness in the first form of mental malady—delusion.

He imagined himself destined to rival, and even to eclipse, Louis the Fourteenth of France. He dreamt but of building palaces as magnificent as Versailles. His carriages were in the style of the eighteenth and not the nineteenth century. Carrying out this idea, he built at Neuschwanstein, in the neighbourhood of Hohenschwangau, a palace in the style of Versailles. He lavished enormous sums on his predominant *idée fixe*. One benefit alone arose out of his mad expenditure. He scarcely employed any but Bavarian workpeople.

These castles being built, Linderhof, Berg and Hohenschwangau, he spent all his time amidst the works of art he had originated in nursing his ruling passion for solitude. As time went on, it became evident how it must end. His brother (the present King Otho) had become insane, and his malady is still considered incurable. Lewis the Second absolutely refused to appear in public, even on occasions such as imperatively demanded his doing so; for years no one except his immediate attendants saw him, and on the occasion of his rare drives in the Englische Garten gendarmes were posted lest by accident some Bavarian subject might chance to pass his king. He would never willingly allow himself to be seen. Other symptoms of insanity set in. He

would order the opera house to be closed to the public, and enjoy, as their sole spectator, performances that had cost large sums to produce.

When in the mountains he would turn night into day, driving out in his huge gilded coach, lighted by torch bearers to show the driver the way up the mountainous roads. Whenever he came to his capital it was at night that he chose to arrive. While there he lived in four rooms at the top of the Residenz, from which he could easily pass into that winter garden, of fabulous beauty, which this extravagant monarch had had constructed, the better to indulge himself in a hermit's life.

There, amid kiosks of rare loveliness, waterfalls, palms, orange and banana trees, flowers of every hue and perfume, with a miniature lake amidst their artistically arranged groups, the unhappy prince would wander, reading poetry or listening to hidden music, refusing the healthy intercourse of man with man. Thus wrapt up in an ideal world the poor brain grew feeble and feeble, and it was evident to all that the time must come when something would have to be done. All this was terrible for Bavaria, but over one part of his subjects he still ruled paramount. His life, so secluded and mysterious, was surrounded by the halo of romance that hung round it, and the peasants about his castles all adored him, although he was rarely seen, even in the mountains. He loved his mother deeply, and I have read somewhere a pretty anecdote of how one evening Queen Marie, looking out of her window at Hohenschwangau, admired a remarkably beautiful fir tree in front of her rooms. She called one of her ladies. "Would not that tree look splendid," she cried, "if it were lighted up at Christmas with candles and ornaments? Isn't it a lovely fir tree!"

The following Christmas, when the queen-mother was again at Hohenschwangau, the king took her himself to the window and begged her to look out. Her admiration of the fir tree had been related to him, and he had had it decorated in a splendid manner. It stood there in the clear, cold open air that December evening, lighted up by thousands of tapers, and splendid gifts attached to its branches—a Christmas tree worthy of a queen!

A few years later, serious signs of insanity began to show themselves in the king, and could no longer be denied. Rumours arose about his intense and morbid desire for solitude. Even those who loved and admired him the most could not conceal their apprehensions as to the source of so much eccentricity. His younger brother, Prince Otho, had long shown symptoms of insanity, from which he has never recovered, and was in confinement. At length it became apparent to all that Lewis the Second was becoming hopelessly insane. He took a dislike to all his best friends. He shut himself up more and more. One day, his signature being absolutely necessary to some State documents, his ministers begged him to see them. The king declined to admit

any one of them to his presence. The situation demanded extraordinary measures. His uncle, Prince Luitpold (the present Prince Regent), went to Hohenschwangau. He was denied admittance to the king's presence. Disregarding the refusal, he walked into the king's private apartment. No sooner did the king see his uncle than he touched a spring in one of the lovely panels of the room and disappeared through a doorway, so constructed that it afforded him an unseen means of exit. This craving after solitude was followed by great restlessness. One day he would set off (generally at night) to Berg; the following morning he would hurry back to a castle that he had quitted probably only the preceding day; but he never seemed cheered up, or the better for frequenting his various palaces. In the midst of the exquisite places he had spent so much money on constructing, seated amidst the works of art he had originated, the unhappy prince would sit, planning how he could continue to build palaces, which when completed he could not inhabit, while his exchequer was exhausted, and the keeper of his privy purse at his wits' end how to replenish it, in order to pay his Majesty's debts. Both German and foreign newspapers were full of this poor monarch's vagaries, and no tale seemed too improbable to be printed as proofs of his increasing malady. In vain those about him (who dared approach him) pointed out that his mania for building could no longer be indulged in with an empty exchequer, and the press suggested that by retrenchment, and by exhibiting the palaces to the public, the privy purse might be refilled. The lonely king still projected and projected fresh schemes for building splendid castles, and left no means untried to borrow money to enable him to do so.

A crisis came; something had to be done. The king's brother being out of the question, a regency was determined upon; and Prince Luitpold being (after Prince Otho) the next heir to the crown, was the proper person to fill the position. On the 10th of June, 1886, Prince Luitpold issued a proclamation, signed by himself and all the ministers.

The day before, a deputation composed of five or six noblemen, ministers of State and others, were sent to Hohenschwangau, to tell the king that his uncle had become Regent, and to inquire into the state of his Majesty's mind. A strong party of medical men and mental attendants accompanied them.

Before the deputation arrived Lewis, having heard of their errand, sent a telegram forbidding them to proceed further on their way, and Count Holnstein, who had gone on before, was imprisoned on his arrival at the castle and kept in close custody by the royal gendarmes by the king's own orders.

The commission, proceeding on their way in spite of the prohibition, were treated exactly as Count Holnstein had been. They were charged with high treason, arrested and imprisoned, as were the doctors and mental attendants. The peasants in the vicinity

of Hohenschwangau (who were devoted to the king) assembled round the castle and riots seemed likely. The Munich gendarmes were sent off to the castle, and military force appeared even necessary, for the peasants would not believe in the king's insanity, and threatened to use force to eject those who were acting under the regent's authority. Another surprise followed, the poor king determined to set off to his palace at Berg. With the cunning of the insane, Lewis appeared suddenly to become resigned to his fate.

The press, while rejoicing in his quieter symptoms, nevertheless announced that he had avowed his intention of taking poison, or of throwing himself out of the turret windows, and in fact about two o'clock one morning, when all was still dark at Hohenschwangau, and rain was falling, he demanded the key of the tower. The servant in attendance declared he could not find it (in order to gain time), one of the doctors, Professor Gudden, having been sent for. However, the king had been so persistent that he had obtained possession of the key, and was on the point of rushing up to the top of the tower when Dr. Gudden arrived. He persuaded his Majesty to return to his rooms and advised him to leave for Berg. The king consented to do so. Dr. Gudden and his assistants sent for the royal carriages and assisted the king to get into his own equipage. Although no one went inside the carriage with him, great precautions were taken by the medical men and the mental attendants to prevent his escape from their care. As he got into his carriage, his face (so relate the newspapers of the day) was pale as death, his eyes were excited, his gait unsteady, and his head bent down on his breast. When the *cortège* stopped to change horses, the king, contrary to his usual custom, put the windows of his carriage down and talked kindly to the people at the inn, asking for a glass of water. All seemed quieter and more hopeful at Berg, when they got to their destination, and at Munich hopes began to be entertained of his recovery. Strange to say, it was a very stormy night. The elements seemed almost to portend the disaster at hand. The Bavarians are very early risers, and at daybreak at Munich came the tidings of his death. The king had thrown himself into the lake, and his doctor, Professor Gudden (probably intending to rescue him), had jumped in after him. What actually happened will never really be known.

A large crowd assembled outside the palace, gloomy and threatening in appearance, the tragical fate of the king being attributed to the designs of the regent. It was only when their favourite, Prince Alphonse, the Regent's nephew, appeared coming out of the palace, having just taken an oath of allegiance to the new King Otho, his voice the while being broken by sobs, that menacing words were followed by those of sympathy, for he is the most popular prince in Munich.

It was a tragedy indeed, and it is not yet forgotten. I was one

day in the palace courtyard talking to an old attendant, who knew that I had the *entrée* to the court. He begged me to get leave to visit the vault that holds all that is mortal of the late king. The permission was obtained, and I descended into the vault under the chancel of the court church, dedicated to St. Michael.

On the splendid violet pall covering the coffin lay a freshly twined wreath of red and white flowers.

"The Empress of Austria," said the attendant, "was here yesterday, and placed them there."

She had been staying for ten days at the Four Seasons Hotel, and ill and rheumatic as she then was, she had found time and inclination to visit her favourite cousin's tomb. Lewis the Second had not been forgotten by her, and when, ten days later, her own son died in so terrible a way, she must have recollected her visit to the vault. A large silver crucifix above the coffin, royal dead, each in their appointed niche around their vault, Maria Theresa's remains among them, it was a weird scene! As we slowly left the *Gruft* we saw that the attendant (receiving our gratuity) had tears in his eyes.

As we went homewards across the Kaiser Hof of the Residenz, the Regent's pretty open carriage was standing at one of the doors of the palace. We stopped to see the genial kind-hearted old man pass. The blue and white liveried postillions, and he himself and his equerry, in *costume de chasse*, going off to enjoy a day's sport, "one of his greatest pleasures" (as he told me one evening), were a strange contrast to the tomb we had visited.

The bowing attendants, the tatoo of the guard, and even the pleasant smile and wave of the hand he gave one of us (whom he knew well and recognized) as the carriage rolled past, seemed out of keeping with the *Gruft* in St. Michael's we had just been to.

Lewis the Second, the mad, suicidal king, gone—another ruler filling his place!

"Death's cold white hand is like the snow
Laid softly on the furrowed hill,
It hides the broken heart below
And leaves the summit brighter still."

These few reminiscences are written by one who has ever experienced much kindness and hospitality in *mein lieber München!* to show that all the royal princes are *not* insane. The present Regent is, indeed, a very capable, superior man, and the "pity of it" is that he is *not* popular.

I really don't know why. He was very much beloved in his middle age and devotedly attached to his beautiful wife (long since dead); he has led all his life a religious, *rangé* and exemplary career. He was one of the sons of Lewis the First, and alone survives out of all that family, with the exception of his favourite sister, the Duchess of Modena, who was visiting him at the time of our resi

dence in Munich. He was born in 1821, and is therefore just sixty-eight years of age.

He is a most amiable prince, but not handsome, though being slight he looks well in uniform. He has three sons; all three are married. The eldest married an Archduchess of D'Este, who is an interesting personage in English eyes. If the Stuarts were still the reigning house of Great Britain, she would be, if the right of *'descent'* established her claims, Mary the Fourth of England. The second son, Prince Leopold, married his cousin, the Archduchess Gisela, sister to the unfortunate Archduke Rudolph. On the white ribbon of the wreath she laid on his coffin, which she attached to it herself, were the words "*von deine treue Schwester,*" and she was, I believe, devotedly attached to him. The Regent's youngest son is named Arnulf, and he married a Princess of Lichtenstein. All three princes have the full projecting under lip of the Austrian royal family.

The only explanation ever given me of the regent's unpopularity, was that he had unduly promoted his sons over the heads of officers senior to themselves. Again, I have been told that he is very *narrish*. For many years he was a poor man (for his exalted station) and had a numerous family to provide for. He has always paid his debts very scrupulously, lived within his income, and certainly I saw no signs of undue economy at the magnificent court ball.

The arrangements were superb and on a most liberal scale. The beautiful grand staircase lighted up, pages in full uniform at the entrance holding torches, servants presenting exquisitely mounted *programmes de bal* in blue satin (the Bavarian royal arms in silver on each tiny book) to the ladies as they entered, who were received by the grand chamberlain, Count de Perglas, at the ball-room door, and last, not least, an excellent hot supper, to which the guests sat down, all being well arranged and without confusion.

The sight was just as splendid as when, thirty years, before I had been an invited guest in that brilliant room, lighted up by *wax* candles in handsome chandeliers.

The court entered with as much state as in King Max's time. The circle formed round the room presented a glittering view of many elegant women, whose diamonds were splendid. The Regent spoke to almost every one he knew, and several presentations were made; the Russian minister's wife, in the absence through illness of the English *chargé d'affaires'* wife (a beautiful American), naming those English who, not having been previously introduced, were presented to each prince or princess as they passed the place where the ambassadresses stood.

The Regent's English is excellent. He has a little accent, but he speaks and understands it thoroughly well. His eldest son, Prince Ludwig, also speaks English, and so does the clever Princess

Theresa, his eldest daughter, who has literary tastes. It would be tedious to name all the royal family, but suffice to say it was a magnificent sight, beginning at seven o'clock in the evening and a long cotillion ended the ball about midnight.

Beside the Regent's children, his brother Adalbert's two sons and daughter were present.

The eldest one, Prince Ludwig Ferdinand, is of Spanish descent, his mother having been an Infanta of Spain. He married Princess Marie de la Paz—who speaks and reads English very well—a most gracious lady. Prince Ludwig Ferdinand's diamonds, worn at his collar, were particularly remarkable. This prince had been in London, and was glad he had seen a "yellow fog." His brother, Prince Alphonse, is the most popular member of the present house of Bavaria in Munich.

He is a fine man, twenty-seven years of age, every inch a soldier. He drives beautiful horses, and his "hansom cab," with *two* steeds to draw it, his "tandem," which he drives himself, his sledges and his well-appointed broughams, are always enthusiastically lauded by the inhabitants of Munich.

He walks about alone, and when he appears every hat is lifted, every man, woman, or child cries, "It is Prince Alphonse!"

His popularity is as inexplicable as his uncle's unpopularity is strange. It is probably due to the fact that he is very genial and pleasant; and his expenditure—not, I believe, always regulated by the laws of supply and demand—being lavish, the national taste for show is gratified.

His eldest brother, Ludwig Ferdinand, is like his cousin, Duke Karl Theodor, a doctor. The latter is an excellent oculist, and he and the former were, I was told, always in the "Krankenhaus" by eight o'clock every day.

A kammer ball at court was to have been given when news came of the Archduke Rudolph's death. A large ball had taken place the night before at one of the minister's houses, at which all the royal family had assisted. A gay enjoyable *fête*, no one dreaming of disaster. Next day came the news that the Archduke was dead. The Austrian and Bavarian princes have often intermarried, and the Princess Gisela being his sister, the tidings struck consternation throughout the city. At first it was said to be disease of the heart, but in a few days the whole town rang with the scandalous particulars.

The court went into mourning; a requiem was sung in the Allerheiligen Church, all the royal family being present in full uniform.

The galleries opposite the royal pews were filled with State dignitaries and ambassadors, and a smaller gallery with ladies entitled to occupy seats there by a previous presentation at court. The music was exquisitely lovely, and the scene extraordinary. A large catafalque, surrounded by palms and flowers, was erected opposite

the high altar, and the chapel beneath the gallery where I sat was densely thronged. The requiem sounded very pathetic and soft, but one could not but help thinking of Emerson's lines, when one mused on that wrecked life :

"God offers to every mind its choice between good and evil;
Take which you please—you never can have both."

Yet how well had the life of Rudolph, Archduke of Austria, begun. He had dreamt of making his father's subjects happy; he had married the woman of his choice, he had a fine and cultivated literary taste, heir to a great empire !

The real secret of his tragic death has been well kept. The Pope knows it, the emperor (a sincerely religious man) having written every detail to him. Let us hope he was insane. Those who knew him say he was not. The two or three persons in the secret of what really happened have been exiled from Vienna.

A splendid service at the Ludwig's Church was given in his memory and for the repose of his soul the day after that at court.

Every member of the royal family attended it.

As the court was in mourning, a great many entertainments that had been talked of did not take place; but before the Carnival ended the Armen ball was held at the opera house for the benefit of the poor. It was rather stupid for those in the boxes not to participate in the fun that seemed going on below on the stage, and an *Eis Fest*, to which we went a few days later, was more amusing.

There is excellent ice for skating (always available on the payment of a small fee) when the pond in the middle of the Englische Garten is frozen over. On Wednesdays and Saturdays a band of music plays while skating is going on. We were invited to go to an ice *fête* one February day. It was very cold indeed; but well wrapped up in fur cloaks we much enjoyed seeing the *fête*. Every one almost wore fancy costumes. The Bavarians are extremely fond of dressing themselves up. Waltzes, galops, the Française, lancers, cotillions, were all danced on the pond, which was lighted up with coloured fires. The Germans skate almost as well as they dance. The future King of Bavaria, Prince Ruprecht, the Regent's grandson, is very fond of skating. Being tall and graceful in figure he looks at his best on the ice.

This young prince has been much libelled by the English and foreign papers, who have described him as being very "fast."

He has high spirits—nothing more; and I never heard a word against him, except that one day he ran off for a spree with a friend to Paris. He is, of course, a prince *à marier*. I am told he has a great horror of being married, but as he will be (if he lives) King of Bavaria, he will have to become reconciled to his lot. He is one of twelve children.

We went to a few studios, but I did not see much of Bohemian society in Munich.

I regretted that I had no opportunity of knowing more of Herr von Lenbach, the leading painter in Munich, or of Gabriel Max, whose exquisite "Madonnen Bild" is at present unknown in England. I saw both studios, as well as that of Professor Deffregger, who lives in the Englische Garten. One English lady, the Baroness Tautphoeus, whose clever book, the "Initials," so well known in England, is the best account that has ever been written of Bavaria, still lives. She told me that she is nearly eighty. It is very difficult to believe it, for she has the vivacity of a girl and every faculty is unimpaired. She married a Bavarian nobleman of very old family, and since his death has lived a very retired life.

The Regent's birthday was kept before we left. An exquisite serenade was performed by a military band outside his apartments in the palace. If it were not for the opera and music of Munich, it would be a dull place of residence, nor is it as cheap a place for families as it used to be. Still, we left it with regret, hoping to return, and thinking of it as *lieber München*, and trusting that we might re-echo the farewell words of friends we left behind, as in their guttural accents they said it was to be "*auf Wiedersehen*."

THE END.

LORLAT'S WAGER.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS.

By DENZIL VANE,

AUTHOR OF "LIKE LUCIFER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DECIMUS LORLAT was a very rich young man, fairly popular among his set because, though rich, he was neither parsimonious nor unduly arrogant. Of course he was fully conscious of the power and influence his wealth gave him, but for the present he showed no tendency to abuse that power by making his poorer friends feel his superiority, or by exacting more deference, not to say toadying, than they were disposed to treat him to of their own free-will. Still Decimus Lariat had his faults, and even his most enthusiastic courtiers admitted that they seriously detracted from the general excellence and amiability of his character. One of these unpleasant traits was a fondness for betting in and out of season—not racing bets, not even bets on the rubber, or "backing himself" at *écarté*, all of which doubtful amusements were freely indulged in this rich young man's set; but bets were constantly being offered by Decimus Lariat to the merest acquaintance of an hour's standing, about the most childish, trivial and uninteresting matters, as, for instance, what coloured gown Lady Maniacres would wear at the next Drawing-room; whether or not it would be raining at a given hour and minute on such-and-such a day; how many grey horses would pass the club windows in twenty minutes; how many old gentlemen would be simultaneously reading the *Times* in the club reading-room, and so forth.

"Nobody likes to refuse his stupid bets—it seems to show up a fellow's poverty," grumbled Charlie Monkhonse, who had only a couple of hundred a year beside his pay, and could ill afford to lose even a five-pound note, to Lawrence Rilbeah, his oldest friend and ally.

"I don't see why you shouldn't; at best all betting is foolish and to my mind wrong," answered Rilbeah. "You don't wish to bet because you can't afford to lose; then why on earth haven't you the moral courage to refuse when Lariat or any other fool offers one?"

"Oh, come, Rilbeah, everybody's not such a Spartan as you. Fellow likes to do what his friends do."

"No matter at what cost to his inclination—and pocket, eh?"

"Fellow likes to be in the swim, you see," murmured Charlie deprecatingly; "it's not every one that can find amusement in dry-as-dust books like you."

Rilbeah shrugged his shoulders and looked across at the other with a smile that was not untinged with irony.

"There's no accounting for taste. Loriat likes betting; I like Burton and Montaigne better—I don't intend a pun," he said. "You like risking your neck steeplechasing; old Dryman likes to spend two hours every day in spelling over the money market in the *Times*."

"Hear the philosopher. But, seriously, Rilbeah, can't we do something to stop this tiresome habit of Loriat's?"

"Refuse all his bets and get all your friends to do the same; it takes two to bet just as it takes two to quarrel."

"Loriat isn't half a bad fellow," remarked Charlie evasively, "though he has another bad fault besides his betting; he will brag so dreadfully about his extraordinary coolness and courage under the most trying circumstances. In the smoking-room last night he was drawing the long bow to any extent in a story of some wonderful adventure he had last autumn when he was in California on a shooting expedition. For my part, I didn't believe a word of it."

"Well, he is young yet. I daresay he will mend his faults," replied Rilbeah good-humouredly.

"He won't until he has been given a good lesson. You're just the man to do it, Rilbeah; I wish you would take him in hand, for he really isn't half a bad fellow."

"No doubt," retorted the other dryly; "but why should I go out of my way to play the part of schoolmaster to this excellent young man?"

"Oh, I don't know. I fancied you might like to do a really charitable action. Talk of the angels, &c.," said Charlie in a lower voice, "here he comes—at his favourite game of braggadocio as usual."

Just then a group of young and fashionably-dressed men entered the drawing-room of the Palladium Club, where the above conversation had taken place. In the centre of the group, talking in a loud and boastful manner, was Decimus Loriat, a slight, fair-haired man of seven or eight and twenty, with small, regular features that would have been singularly handsome, were it not for the low, shallow forehead and slightly retreating chin, which gave an expression of weakness to the whole face. He had bright blue eyes and good even white teeth, so that when he smiled he gave one the impression of really being, as Charlie Monkhouse said, "not half a bad fellow."

At that particular moment, however, Loriat did not appear to advantage; his face was flushed, his naturally high-pitched voice

was raised in tones that were decidedly quarrelsome, and his eyes flashed defiant glances around as he delivered himself of a monologue, apparently descriptive of his own personal prowess. According to his wont he brought his harangue to a conclusion with his stereotyped phrase :

"Bet you what you like nothing on earth can frighten *me*, or put me out of countenance. I'm not the man to be alarmed by any of your hairbreadth escapes, nor by any of your thrilling accidents in floods or by fields." (An excited young man, not remarkable for the extent of his reading at the best of times, can hardly be expected to quote even a hackneyed Shakespearian excerpt correctly.) "As for cool cheek, I don't believe one of you fellows could do the things I've done, and, by Jove, will do again. What'll you bet, Duncan, and you, Fielder, and you, Anderton, that I don't go to Lady Crowdham's next reception without an invitation, just for the fun of the thing; of course I could get a card if I wanted it—very few houses where I couldn't."

"Stop, stop!" cried one of the young men addressed; "you go so fast one can't get a word in edgeways. You're ready enough with your bets, but you word them too loosely. I daresay you could go to one of the Crowdham crushes without an invitation, but I'll bet you don't do so without unpleasant consequences. Lady Crowdham has, as I happen to know, an extraordinary memory for faces, and as she makes a point of receiving every guest herself I fancy you would have some difficulty in avoiding some sort of *contretemps*."

"Bet you I will," cried Loriat, who was put on his mettle by the doubt thus cast on his power to carry out his boast. "Bet you I'll go to the reception, make my bow to Lady Crowdham, and come away with flying colours. Book the bet, Anderton. Even odds; a hundred, eh?"

"No unpleasant consequences of *any* sort to result, you know, Loriat. You phrase your bets so loosely," repeated Anderton, smiling. "Don't care for betting myself; still, to oblige you——" here he pulled out his pocket-book, and duly entered the bet.

By that time Loriat and his noisy followers had invaded the quiet corner where Rilbeah and Charlie Monkhouse were seated. Loriat's eyes were instantly attracted to Rilbeah's grave, disapproving face. There was only a very slight acquaintance between them, but in his present mood Loriat was not disposed to stand on ceremony, and the almost contemptuous expression of Rilbeah's eyes irritated him into positive rudeness.

"Look here, Rilbeah, what do you mean by looking at a fellow as if he were dirt, just because he likes a little harmless bet? Why should you set yourself up as—as a sort of paragon?"

"I am not aware that I do so," replied Rilbeah coldly.

"Yes, you do."

"I think betting is a foolish thing, and a practice unworthy of any right-thinking person."

"Don't like losing your money, eh?" sneered Loriat. "Always heard you were close-fisted."

It was not often that he so far forgot himself as to openly insult even a man he hated. Undoubtedly Loriat did hate Rilbeah; not because he had any real tangible reason for doing so, but Rilbeah made him feel small, made him contemptible in his own eyes. Many times when he had been talking loudly—bragging, some censorious people called it—he had caught Rilbeah's eye, and fancied he read contempt in that quiet glance.

Now Rilbeah, though by nature forbearing and temperate, was only human after all. Nothing provoked him to anger more than an accusation of this sort. Forced by circumstances to practise a rigid economy, a reproach of parsimony severely tried his philosophic calm; and an accusation so publicly made was doubly galling. Turning on Loriat with heightened colour and flashing eyes, Rilbeah said in short, sharp decisive tones:

"I disapprove of betting, Mr. Loriat, from motives with which I need not trouble you; but I am not afraid of losing my money, and to prove the truth of my words I will accept the bet you offered to Anderton a while since. But I must do so on my own terms."

"All right," cried Loriat good-humouredly. "State your terms. I promise to accept them beforehand." He was ashamed of the ungenerous words he had spoken, and anxious to atone for them in the only manner he knew of.

"It's an absurd thing to bet about, namely that you will go to Lady Crowdham's next reception uninvited without unpleasant consequences. You pride yourself, I believe, on your imperturbable *sang-froid*, Mr. Loriat, and declare that nothing can shake your equanimity. I doubt that statement, and if you can prove that I am wrong—if you do carry out your project and come off with flying colours—I will pay £100 to any deserving charity you like to select. On the other hand, if you fail *you* will do the same—pay £100 to some hospital to be decided on afterwards."

"Done. I'm your man," retorted Loriat, elated at having forced the cool and contemptuous Rilbeah to break, even in this unorthodox fashion, his non-betting rule. "I only wish the odds were heavier."

"Lady Crowdham's reception comes off next week," put in Charlie Monkhouse, laughing. "I've got a card, so I shall be there to see the fun."

"And so shall I," chimed in Anderton.

"And so shall I," echoed Duncan and Fielder. All three secretly desired to see the braggart worsted, all having good reason to dislike Loriat's practice of universal betting, though none of them had the courage to bell the cat.

The bet was duly chronicled in the pocket-books of Loriat and Rilbeah, and the latter, feeling half ashamed of having allowed his temper to be ruffled, left the club, went straight to his rooms, and spent the rest of the afternoon in the congenial company of his favourite meerschaum and a volume of his beloved "Montaigne."

* * * * *

That evening Fielder, Anderton and Charlie Monkhouse held a council of war in the rooms of the last-named.

"It is quite time Loriat had a lesson given him. I'm awfully glad old Rilbeah rose at him like that. Though Loriat professes to look on him as a foggy and a bookworm and that sort of thing he respects him, and looks up to him too," remarked Charlie, who had a loyal friendship and very genuine esteem for "old Rilbeah."

"That was a nasty one of Loriat's, that sneer at Rilbeah's close-fistedness; unjust too, for I have heard several stories of his generosity. He gives away more than he can afford, pinches himself to help some bedridden old aunt down in Devonshire, I believe, and he is always ready to lend a fellow a five-pound note, as I know," sententiously commented Fielder.

"Loriat is a braggart, and I think a coward," said Anderton. "I never believe in your romancing sort. That story of his about that shooting adventure in California was all bunkum, in *my* opinion."

"I daresay. Well, next week will see a change come over the spirit of Mr. Decimus Loriat's dream," remarked Fielder. "Lady Crowdham will give him one of her 'looks,' and I don't fancy he will be able to brazen the affair out."

Anderton murmured something about it serving Loriat right, and that he was doing a very ungentlemanlike thing, in his opinion, by presuming to enter any lady's drawing-room uninvited.

* * * * *

During the next few days Loriat was in high feather. Unabashed by the disapproving glances of Rilbeah, he launched out into long rodomontades descriptive of his own remarkable *aplomb* and personal valour under the most trying circumstances. The trio of friends who had agreed that it would serve Loriat right to get a lesson he would remember often exchanged significant glances, and smiled as they listened to the high-pitched rasping tones of this modern Parolles.

"Patience, my friends," whispered Anderton; "in a few short days, like Ichabod, his glory will have departed."

The evening of Lady Crowdham's reception at length arrived. The triumvirate had met several times, and again and again reiterated their opinion that Loriat's pride would shortly have a fall great in proportion to the altitude to which his effrontery had raised him.

Loriat himself was confident that he would, as he phrased it, "score off" Rilbeah. He swaggered into his club hoping to show off to his opponent; but Rilbeah, who, now that he had had time to think quietly over the affair, regretted his share in it, did not put in an appearance at the Palladium during a whole week, but remained shut up in his rooms, where he was presumably immersed in his favourite studies. At any rate he was invisible, and Loriat flattered himself that "old Rilbeah" already despaired of winning the wager he had accepted in a moment of pique, and that he therefore kept purposely out of his way.

Much elated by a supposition so flattering to his vanity, Loriat dressed himself on the eventful evening with rather more care than usual, and drove off about ten o'clock to Lady Crowdham's house, where he was of course admitted without question. But when he found himself in the crowd on the staircase, slowly moving upwards to the spacious landing where Lady Crowdham stood to receive her guests, her handsome but severe and haughty countenance radiant with smiles, a sudden panic seized him. For the life of him he dared not face his unwitting hostess. Glancing around him in dismay he believed he saw a way of escaping the ordeal he dreaded. Half way up the staircase was a curtain-hung arch. If he could slip through it unperceived and remain *perdu* for an hour or so until Lady Crowdham quitted her post he might avoid the unpleasant ordeal of meeting her face to face. None of his three friends were visible; they would never know that he had "shirked" the most trying part of his self-appointed adventure. In the dense crowd it was not difficult to carry out the strategic movement he had planned. Whisking aside the heavy red curtain he found that the arch led to the entresol, where apparently reigned complete solitude; none of the rooms seemed to be prepared for the reception of guests, and the corridor itself was but dimly lighted by a few gas lamps.

Loriat flattered himself that he had found a haven where he might pass an hour or two undisturbed. If any of the servants chanced to visit the rooms it would be easy to find an excuse for his presence there. Having selected a particularly comfortable easy-chair, Loriat proceeded to make himself very much at home, sinking at first into a pleasant reverie, in which he indulged in sundry anticipations of triumph when he should meet his three friends and boldly claim to have won his wager—then into a light doze, which was prolonged a good deal longer than the hour or so he had intended to remain *perdu*. For when he awoke, on consulting his watch, he found that it was past one o'clock. Hurrying out of the room he made his way along the dimly lighted corridor, pushed aside the curtain and found himself on the grand staircase leading to the large reception rooms on the first floor.

Sounds of distant music caught Loriat's ear as, assuming his

usual jaunty air, he slowly descended the staircase and proceeded in the direction from whence the sounds came.

The hall was almost deserted, only one or two footmen in plush and powder being visible. Having asked of one of these worthies the way to the supper-room, for Loriat had been so excited at the idea of "scoring off" old Rilbeah that he had not been able to eat much at dinner, and consequently now felt very hungry, he proceeded thither in the hope of securing the wing of a chicken and a glass of champagne before going home.

The dining-room at Crowdham House was a magnificent apartment adjoining the conservatory, where a military band was discoursing sweet music while Lady Crowdham's guests were doing ample justice to the good things provided by their hospitable hostess.

Keeping a careful look-out for Monkhouse and his two allies, Loriat edged his way in among the crowd and begged one of the attendant Jeameses to bring him the refreshments for which his soul yearned. That stately creature however, though he bowed obsequiously and departed as if in quest of the desired viands, did not re-appear. Just as Loriat was about to address himself to another footman he was lightly touched on the shoulder by a solemn-visaged man of dark complexion.

"Excuse me, sir, I think I heard you ask for some chicken and a glass of champagne. Permit me to serve you."

The man spoke with a slightly foreign accent; his manners however were those of a highly respectable butler, and as a further badge of his office he carried a spotless white serviette under his arm.

"The major-domo," thought the famished Loriat; "*he* won't go off and leave me like that confounded fellow in plush."

In effect the major-domo proved a good friend, for he shortly appeared bearing in one hand a plate of chicken with lobster salad, and in the other a foaming tumbler of champagne.

Having partaken of these refreshments at one of the numerous small tables dotted about the room, Loriat felt another man.

"If monseigneur would like a cigarette," murmured the major-domo in his ear when the chicken and champagne had been duly disposed of, "I can guide him to a quiet place where he can smoke one."

Loriat was a fervent devotee of St. Nicotine, so he gladly jumped at the idea, resolving to bestow half-a-sovereign on this attentive and thoughtful servitor.

"Thank you," he said gratefully. "I certainly should like a cigarette."

"Follow me, sir."

And Loriat, piloted through the crowd by his obsequious guide, soon found himself in a small ante-room in a remote part of the house belonging presumably to the servants' quarters, for the room was filled with empty bottles, plates and dishes.

Drawing his cigarette-case from his pocket he proceeded to "light up," puffing out a volume of smoke with much enjoyment. The major-domo watched him for some minutes in silence. Then, as if the odour of tobacco awoke the desire to offer also at the shrine of the saint mentioned above, he suddenly stretched out his hand and boldly asked Loriat for a cigarette.

"Cool!" murmured the astonished young man under his breath. But he good-naturedly complied, and the major-domo was soon enveloped in a perfumed cloud.

"You think that I have taken a liberty, I see, sir," he said between two puffs, "but I am not what I seem. Monseigneur need not consider that it is beneath his dignity to smoke with me. Though I wear the garb of a servant I am of noble birth."

"One of the exiled nobles of Italy or Spain, I suppose," commented Loriat to himself. But he only bowed politely in reply, and the major-domo continued:

"I occupy my post here—from political motives," here he dropped his voice to a mysterious whisper. "At Crowdham House I have many opportunities of serving the association to which I belong. I know something about all Lady Crowdham's friends and guests."

"Good gracious—hope he doesn't know that I am here uninvited," thought Loriat, dismayed.

It seemed as if the major-domo were a "thought reader," for his next words were:

"I know all about your reasons for coming here to-night. Pshaw! I shall not betray you," he added in a reassuring tone, for Loriat's face lengthened visibly. "I like your honest English countenance, and I believe that in you I shall find a friend—an ally. Nay, do not draw back—the Count di Raccarossa is no unsuitable friend for Mr. Decimus Loriat."

"The fellow even knows my name! I must be cautious, and humour his absurd whim of wishing to have me for a friend," thought the young man, drops of perspiration beading his forehead as he thought of the possibility of his escapade reaching the ears of Lady Crowdham.

"I am honoured by your regard, count, and—and—if I can serve you in any way——"

"You can. Accompany me to the apartments of my countryman, the Prince de Grandocore, where we can talk more freely than in this wretched hole," here he glanced round with disgust at the soiled plate and dishes which littered the room.

Loriat would have given a great deal to refuse, but he dared not offend this nobleman in disguise, who knew his secret, and might make things very unpleasant for him if he chose.

"I shall be delighted," he said aloud.

"Then come at once. It is already late. Madame's guests have by this time departed."

And he led the way out of the room, down a dark and narrow passage.

"Allow me to get my hat and overcoat," whispered Loriat.

"I am leading you to the apartment where you left them," answered the count with a smile.

He was as good as his word. In five minutes Loriat's hat and coat were handed to him, and he and his new friend made their way to the entrance, where the count hailed a hansom.

"Does your friend live at some distance from here?" he asked uneasily, for he was getting sleepy, and longed to get home to bed.

"A matter of two or three miles. We shall be there in a few minutes," answered the count, as he jumped into the cab and seated himself by Loriat's side.

"To Fulham," he called out to the cabby. "I will direct you later on."

The hansom set off westward at a spanking pace. Loriat's drowsiness increased every moment; he was vaguely conscious that the count was talking, but he made no sense of the words, and in another minute he was in a deep, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Loriat came to himself his brain felt dull and confused, and he was in total darkness. At first he failed to remember any of the events of the evening. He believed himself in bed in his own comfortable chambers, just awake, in fact, from a sleep that had had its dreams, for he had a sort of blurred idea of having met with one of those strange, inconsequent adventures that are peculiar to dreamland.

But as he slowly regained full possession of his faculties he became aware that the total darkness in which he was enveloped was due to a bandage over his eyes, tied in so complicated a knot at the back of his head that his trembling fingers failed to undo it.

What then had happened to him?

Where was he?

Where was his mysterious friend the count?

Like a mist rolling away to reveal the details of a landscape, the dull lethargy that obscured his brain was dissipated, and he remembered everything: his wager, his visit to Crowdham House, his obliging friend the major-domo—no, the Count di Raccarossa—his supper, his cigarette, the count's confidences, and finally his drive Fulham-wards in company with that polite foreigner.

Loriat's heart sank into his patent leather pumps as he staggered to his feet after another frantic endeavour to untie the handkerchief which completely enveloped his head.

Good heavens! had he been hounded and taken to some den of thieves, possibly of murderers, where he would be robbed and basely done to death? He tried to call out, but the muffling handkerchief was thick and stifled his cries.

What a terrible position he was in! Alone, at dead of night, in some den of crime and lawlessness. The count was, no doubt, the decoy to some gang of desperate ruffians, and he, Loriat, the luckless victim of a base plot.

Oh! why had he hungered untimeously for that chicken and that champagne—drugged champagne, no doubt! Why had he allowed himself to be cajoled by that specious wastrel? why had he deliberately walked into the trap set for him?

Groping about him blindly, Loriat stumbled against several chairs and tables, upsetting one of the latter, and with it a quantity of glass, which fell to the ground with a crash and shiver of breakage enough to waken a whole houseful of heavy sleepers.

"Now I've made matters worse!" thought Loriat despairingly. "I've destroyed what little chance I had of making my escape from this dreadful place."

Indeed, so it seemed, for there were sounds of approaching footsteps on the stairs; a shuffling and low whispering on the landing, and in another instant the door opened.

Half frantic with terror, Loriat made one final attempt to wrench the muffling handkerchief from his head. But all his efforts were vain.

"Come, Mr. Loriat," said a voice he thought he recognized—a mellifluous voice speaking English with a slight foreign accent—"it is useless to struggle. I am about to remove the handkerchief, which has faithfully performed its office. But I must first have a promise from you. However surprised—I will not say *frightened*, for no doubt you are a man of courage—you may be by the scene you are about to witness, you must solemnly swear not to cry out. Will you give me your word of honour not to do so? I will then relieve you of the handkerchief, which I fear is sadly inconveniencing to you."

"Stay," added the voice, as poor Loriat made an unintelligible gurgle, "a gesture of assent will suffice—we shall consider the oath binding," finished Raccarossa, as the required gesture was hastily made by the victim.

He approached, and Loriat turned cold with apprehension as the foreign nobleman's lissom fingers busied themselves with the Gordian knot at the back of his head.

"Good gracious! he might strangle me in half a minute!" was the thought that traversed his troubled mind.

But the count apparently had no murderous intentions, for the present, at all events. The handkerchief dropped to the ground, revealing to Loriat's dazed eyes, half-blinded by the sudden ad-

mission of light, a scene that was certainly remarkable enough to surprise any ordinary peaceable and peace-loving citizen.

At the further end of the room, and seated side by side in straight-backed carved oak chairs, were three men, draped from head to foot in long and voluminous mantles, their faces concealed with black masks.

"Salute the brethren," murmured the voice of his tormentor. Loriat turned and beheld, not the urbane smile and handsome face of the dark-complexioned major-domo, but an inscrutable black mask.

Trembling in every limb, Loriat made an awkward obeisance.

"Gentlemen, I have been brought here against my will," he began in husky tones, "gagged—in a hansom. Why I do not know—I—I am innocent of any offence; I—I am not aware that I have done anything to displease——"

"Silence!" interrupted the stern voice of the count; "this is not a time to speak idle words. You are here to listen and to obey. You stand in the presence of men who hold your fate, your life even, in the hollow of their hands. At a word from them death can be your portion."

"But what have I done?" exclaimed Loriat desperately. "How have I offended these—gentlemen?"

"We need agents; we are men who shrink from no measures by which the Cause we serve may be advanced. Your foolish conduct to-night has placed you in our power; we mean to use that power to secure the ends we have in view. The brethren of the Order of the Stiletto are the foes of all governments, whether monarchical or pseudo-republican; we need new members, English members especially. You are about to be admitted into the Brotherhood, an honour of which I fear you are not worthy——"

"No—indeed—indeed I am not," interpolated Decimus hastily.

"But the Cause is a glorious cause, and we must not be over squeamish in regard to the tools we use. You have a certain position in society; you have opportunities of hearing things which may be useful to us to know," continued the count blandly, "therefore we propose to enrol your name to-night in our register. As a member of the Brotherhood you will blindly obey the orders given you by the council; you will report yourself once a week here to give an account of the work with which you will be intrusted."

During the delivery of this exordium Loriat was able to note that the room in which he found himself was furnished with considerable luxury, that it was as unlike the squalid den of thieves and murderers his imagination had pictured as a room could be. Drawing some little comfort from this fact, he managed to keep up some semblance of composure, though his knees still shook and his face was pallid with fear.

The three veiled figures at the further end of the apartment

neither moved nor spoke, Raccarossa being apparently the spokesman of the council.

"Will you take the oath we require of you? Remember, if you refuse the consequences will be—well, painful in the extreme; but we are desperate men, and we must guard our safety, no matter at what cost," he continued, laying his hand on Loriat's shoulder.

That gentleman was not a hero of the impassive, fearless Ouidasque type. Under the circumstances he thought that discretion was the better part of valour.

"I will take the oath," he muttered huskily. "I will swear anything if—if you will only let me go home."

"That is well. Approach that table and I will administer the oath."

The unhappy young man obeyed; with slow and reluctant steps he approached the table indicated. On it he was horrified to see a grinning human skull and two murderous-looking daggers, crossed.

"Put your hand on the skull," dictated his tormentor in a stern voice.

Shuddering with disgust and terror, Loriat placed his trembling hand on the bony relic of humanity and duly repeated after the count the oath of obedience to the Brotherhood.

"You will be brought here to-morrow night," said the count, when the ceremony was concluded, "and remember, if you breathe a word of what has happened to-night in this room, even to your most intimate friend, we shall hear of it, and you will pay a terrible penalty for your disobedience. Now you are dismissed. Salute the brethren." Here the new member of the "Stiletto" secret society bowed low. As he did so the handkerchief was again thrown over his head and quickly knotted by the skilful fingers of the count. Led by that terrible personage, Loriat was conducted out of the room, down what seemed to him an interminable flight of stairs, along a passage, through a door, and, as he judged by the coldness of the atmosphere, out into a garden. A gate was opened and shut, and then the unhappy Loriat was suddenly seized in the brawny arms of his companion and lifted into a vehicle of some sort. Whispered directions were given to the driver, and in another moment he was being whirled along, the beat of the horse's feet on the road alone breaking the silence. His companion—for a hand on his arm made him conscious that he was not yet out of the clutches of the Brotherhood—never spoke during that rapid drive; but at the end of a quarter of an hour the handkerchief was removed from Loriat's head. So dazed was he, however, by the extraordinary events of the night, that he was unable to recognize the locality through which the vehicle sped; a sort of stupor fell on him, that was not dispelled until they were at their journey's end, which, to Loriat's unspeakable

relief, proved to be his own chambers. Having rung the bell, the terrible Count di Raccarossa left him—after whispering in his ear one deep-toned “Remember!”—jumped into the cab, which drove rapidly off down a side street.

* * * * *

Loriat's emotions when he awoke next morning may be better imagined than described. He looked haggard and pale as, somewhere about midday, he rose, dressed himself and sat down, though with but a poor appetite, to breakfast. How was it possible that he could eat even the daintiest fare with the terrible remembrance in his mind of the Brotherhood, the black mask, the skull, and those two horrid crossed daggers? But having drunk three large cups of strong coffee and smoked as many cigarettes, Loriat felt a little better. Then came another unwelcome recollection—his wager. How mortifying it would be to have Charlie Monkhouse, Anderton, Wilder and Duncan pronouncing that he had lost his bet to Rilbeah; how vexatious it would be to meet the latter's grave, contemptuous eyes.

Was there no way of evading that mortification, that vexation? Like most cowards—and Loriat was a coward to the very marrow of his bones—he was also a liar. There was one method of averting the ridicule he dreaded; he could lie his best, could pretend that he had come successfully out the ordeal, and so win his wager. Loriat's conscience was not a particularly tender one, and his vanity was inordinate. He soon made up his mind to adopt that easy and dishonourable method of sneaking out of the unpleasant position in which his folly had placed him.

Dressing himself carefully and assuming his most swaggering air he left his chambers and strolled down to the Palladium, where he was soon joined by Monkhouse and his three friends.

“Well, old fellows, so you didn't turn up last night at Lady Crowdham's. I looked everywhere for you,” he exclaimed, in his high rasping tones. “Sorry you didn't turn up; the evening was a success.”

“What, from your point of view? Then has Rilbeah lost his bet with you?” queried Monkhouse, looking him straight in the eyes.

“Of course. Didn't I say he would?” retorted Loriat, unabashed.

“Here comes Rilbeah,” remarked Anderton.

And that quiet personage was soon the centre of a noisy group.

“Loriat claims to have won his wager,” cried Wilder, who had not yet spoken.

The young man's dark eyes were alight with suppressed laughter, but he manifested no disposition to challenge the genuineness of the claim.

“Oh, does he?” answered Rilbeah coldly. “I am ready to pay £100 to any hospital he likes to select—to-morrow.”

"Why not to-day? You've lost, you know; why not pay up to-day?" demanded Loriat offensively.

"I prefer to put off the decision of the bet until to-morrow. Do you refuse to wait?"

"I? Oh, no," retorted the other uneasily, for he remembered what he had forgotten for the moment, that he would have to appear before the Council of the Brotherhood that evening.

"Very well, then; for the present the matter can remain *in statu quo*," rejoined Rilbeah.

Monkhouse and his three friends supported Rilbeah, and Loriat was obliged to assent.

He spent the rest of the day at the club, for he was nervously afraid of being alone, and as evening approached his terror increased to panic, for he felt an uncomfortable premonition that the Count di Raccarossa would in some strange manner force him to keep his word and appear at midnight in the dreadful chamber where he had sworn fidelity to the Brotherhood.

And so it proved. As he left a theatre, whither he had repaired with the faint hope of forgetting his troubles for an hour, he felt that he was being followed, and though he made several attempts to "dodge" his pursuer, on reaching his own doorstep a hand was laid on his shoulder and a voice he recalled only too well whispered in his ear:

"Remember the price of disobedience. You cannot hide from us. Follow me."

Suppressing his momentary impulse to call "Police" (for he had read a good deal of sensational light literature, and was convinced of his own utter helplessness and of the boundless power of secret societies), Loriat obeyed. In five minutes he was seated in a hansom with the mysterious count by his side, bowling along towards Fulham, exactly as on the previous evening; but this time no drowsiness seized him, nor were his eyes bandaged, his companion evidently depending on moral intimidation only.

Half dead with fear the hapless Loriat was wafted along at a headlong speed, as it seemed to his disordered fancy, and in due course they alighted from the hansom, and Loriat found himself standing before a gate, which was quickly opened by his companion.

"Follow me," again whispered the count.

And Loriat followed docilely enough, for he was too frightened to resist. Passing through a garden of some extent, he was ushered into a house of moderate size. The staircase down which he had been led on the previous night was quite dark, but guided by the count's careful hand Loriat managed to drag his shaking limbs up to the floor above. Light streamed from beneath a door to the right, and towards this he was impelled by the strong hands of his terrible companion. The door was opened and he again stood in the presence of the masked and mantle-shrouded Brethren of the Stiletto.

"You are come—it is well," said a sonorous voice, proceeding from one of the mysterious brothers.

"Say, has your conduct since you left this house been worthy of our Order?"

"Y—yes," stammered Loriat, who by that time had not a dry thread on him, so bathed was he in cold perspiration.

"You lie!" thundered the sonorous voice. "And to prove that you lie my brothers and I will unmask."

Gracious powers! was he dreaming? As the masks and cloaks were thrown aside Loriat saw, not the dark and scowling faces of a band of midnight assassins, but the cold, contemptuous faces of his friends—Charlie Monkhouse, Duncan and Anderton. With a reeling brain he turned towards his companion. But in him, too, an extraordinary transformation was effected. The bushy black beard, the scowling black eyebrows were gone, and Willie Wilder's handsome dark eyes flashed scornfully on him.

"Well, Loriat, you are a bigger coward and a bigger fool and knave than I would have believed," said that young man, not in the foreign-accented tones of the count, but in the cold measured tones of a very indignant young Englishman. "We began this as a practical joke, just to prove that courage of which you have so frequently boasted; but the matter has gone further than we intended. You have lied to us, and tried to cheat Anderton and Rilbeah out of their money. Conduct so disgraceful as yours is unpardonable. As for your cowardly terrors, see how baseless they were. These rooms are my new lodgings at Fulham, where I removed a week ago for a little change of air. A false beard and eyebrows, four masks and cloaks, hired from a costumier, were enough to frighten you into fits. Let this be a lesson to you. Brag no more, bet no more—and, above all, lie no more."

"But how did you get into Crowdham House?" murmured Loriat feebly.

"I had an invitation," retorted Wilder. "To pop on a false beard and a pair of eyebrows in a quiet corner was not difficult, *after* I had made my bow to Lady Crowdham. I didn't think I was such a good actor. So you never detected my 'foreign accent,' eh? Well, Loriat, as I said, let this be a lesson to you. You will pay £100 to St. Thomas' Hospital, and hand over the same sum to Anderton."

"That £100 shall go to the hospital, too," interrupted Anderton quickly; "I don't want to profit by his cowardice and folly."

"All right; so much the better for the poor patients. And now, Loriat, as I think you have been punished enough, come and take some supper with the Brethren of the Stiletto."

THE ARAB'S ADIEU.

I DARE not turn and gaze again
Upon thy sinless brow ;
One more fond look would fatal be
Unto mine honour now.

I dare not meet that loving gaze,
Those dreamy eyes of thine,
Or heed the soft red quivering lips,
Which murmur close to mine.

Nay, not that look of anguish, love ;
My life, my own, my heart !
The agony's not all with thee
When thus we sadly part.

Nay, twine not round me, darling one,
Those tender, clinging hands ;
Stronger are they to keep me here,
Than forgèd iron bands.

Ah ! cease those heavy sobs of woe,
Those weary sighs of pain ;
I must depart, indeed I must ;
Thy sorrow is in vain !

Ties, race, religion, honour, all
Forbid me here to stay,
Yet, think of me sometimes, my life,
When I am far away.

JOSEPHINE ERROL.

THE WOMAN OF THIRTY-FIVE.

By MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED.

BALZAC has laid down the theory that a woman of thirty—which classification may be assumed to extend to thirty-five—is at her most fascinating and dangerous age; dangerous, that is to say, to the hearts of men. Perhaps no writer understood his own countrywomen better than Balzac, and perhaps no writer has contributed to social philosophy so many cynical reflections on the sex in general. But Balzac's axioms would apply as a rule to a certain type of woman, a type less common, it is to be hoped, in England than in France. The spinster naturally would not enter into his calculations; and even in this country the unmarried "girl" who admits to having passed seven-and-twenty, must be exceptionally circumstanced if she can boast of a large train of adorers. The blushing *débutante* may have things pretty well her own way, and is quite capable of seriously captivating the *blasé* man of the world, who frequently finds an agreeable piquancy in bread-and-butter, milk and rosebuds. She may indeed prove a more enduring delight to such a man than the frisky married women with whom the game of flirtation has hitherto been played with intense satisfaction. But the old-young girl is neither spring-lamb nor Welsh mutton, and not all the garnishing possible will disguise her anomalous flavour or give her the charm of the daisies and the meadow. She has lost the freshness and the ingenuous frankness, and she has not gained the experience and *finesse* which would render her attractive to man; and unless she be well endowed in the matter of rank or worldly goods, and matrimony be solemnly contemplated, however agreeable an acquisition she may be to society, she does not find marked favour in the sight of the average "masher."

Again, there is little danger to be dreaded from the healthy and comely British matron, who has married in the most conventionally happy manner—say at twenty—and who, when the thirties overtake her, is engrossed in care for her children, her household, her husband's comfort, her social, and, if she live in the country, her parochial duties. To such a woman, the question of a school for Johnny, or the translation of Harry from the petticoat to the knickerbocker stage, or the weighty consideration of a French governess for the girls, is of far deeper moment than the indulgence of any emotional

cravings on her own part. She is, perhaps, conscious of such cravings, but only at rare times, and in a vague and visionary manner. Sometimes on soft summer evenings, or by a lonely fireside, fancy will wander and memory will retrace its steps, and she will heave a gentle sigh because life is so prosaic and romance so short-lived. She knows that she would renew the romance if she could do so in legitimate fashion; but her sweet soul would shrink in horror from morbid imaginings, and she has come to recognize the fact, without any heart-burning, that in marriage romance is very soon superseded by the excitements of business speculation or fox-hunting or mild gourmandism, and that she has to resign herself to its absence, and to make up her mind that for her the drama of youth is over.

She is better off, however, in spite of her gentle regrets, than the no less commendable matron in all moral and domestic respects, who has solidified into scorn of youth and poetry and sentiment, and for whom the whole interest of existence is centred, so to speak, in bricks and mortar and hard cash. The other woman—the Helen Pendennis with her pensive memories of the glamour which she believes has vanished for ever from her horizon—will, when the time comes, interest herself more tenderly in the love difficulties of her daughters, will laugh more indulgently over the schoolboy pranks of her sons, will be more sympathetic over her matter-of-fact husband's business worries, or abortive runs, or faulty dinners. For her, music will have a charm, and commonplace things a grace, and life altogether a suggestion of poetry which will make her a pleasanter person to live with, a more kindly counsellor, a truer friend.

There is another class of woman, the woman who has entered the thirties, upon whose drama the curtain is not likely to fall for many a year yet. In all womanly honesty, it may be, she revels in the part of heroine and in the disturbances and agitations of which she is the cause. She will go on indefatigably playing her part and enjoying it, while the lights grow dim and the audience drops off and the *jeune premier* becomes wooden and indifferent. This kind of woman must, as Landor puts it, "warm both hands at the fire of life." Her keenly-strung temperament, alert sensibility and magnetic power of attraction make her the centre of a perfect vortex of emotions. She takes intense pleasure in the storm and tumult of feeling that gathers round her. It gives a zest to existence which, without it, she would find insupportably tame. She does not mean to be cruel; she is not unprincipled. In many cases she herself suffers almost as much as her victims. But excitement, even that of suffering, is a necessity of her being, and she takes comfort in the thought that she, too, can exclaim like Egmont when the end comes, "I cease to live; but I *have* lived." And to this woman, thirty-five is the beginning of the end.

To the ordinary woman of poetic tendencies, but no definite in-

clination towards the dramatic side of life, thirty-five is an age which cannot fail to bring with it a feeling of melancholy and dissatisfaction. It is an uncomfortable point of transition when the mind cannot dwell with any complacency upon past, present or future. The illusions have gone, and the solid realities have not yet quite taken their place. In dress, demeanour and mental outlook a gradual and subtle readjustment has to be considered. It is felt necessary to practise a certain sedateness and dignity of bearing, which must not however be overdone, so as to appear affectation. Attentions which only the other day might have been attributed to the influence of personal beauty and fascination are to-day open at least to the suspicion of interested motives. Partners at balls are less persistent and fewer in number. The delicate aroma of flattery, once breathed as a matter of course, has become sensibly fainter. Amusement seems to drag and the business of pleasure generally inspires a feeling of languor and depression. The woman of thirty-five is not yet bidden to step out of the arena and range herself among the spectators, but Nature has a disagreeable way of reminding her that the hour is approaching. It is as though the first chill breath of autumn which heralds the Indian summer were making itself felt. She will be fortunate if her autumn of beauty brings with it the ripe graces, the tender associations and poetic suggestions which give to the season of decay its mellow charm. She need not after all be deeply concerned or turn back for consolation to the time-honoured precedents of Madame Recamier and Ninon de l'Enclos.

The woman of soul can never, in a true sense, grow old and unattractive. It is the butterfly of fashion who has most to suffer. Her looking-glass, no matter how artfully placed, will sometimes tell her unpleasant tales, and a darting ray of light will cruelly reveal a wrinkle or a grey hair to which she has so far been happily blind. Instinctively she will have recourse to little artifices which she tries to justify to herself without shock to her vanity. She will discover suddenly that fashion requires her to cover a too perceptible parting with a Bond Street *toupet*, and that violet powder is none the less innocuous because it is tinged with pink, and that a graceful contour is dependent upon the skill of a renowned corset-maker. But she knows in her heart that she is commanded to fall behind.

"Ladies, stock and tend your hive,
Trifle not at thirty-five,"

wrote Dr. Johnson in his poem to Mrs. Thrale on her thirty-fifth birthday; to Mrs. Thrale who, nevertheless, got married a second time ten years later, and fell sentimentally in love about a generation after her second husband had been laid in his grave.

THE FIRST SOPRANO OF ST. MARGARET'S.

By EDITH STEWART DREWRY,

AUTHOR OF "ON DANGEROUS GROUND," "ONLY AN ACTRESS," "SEEN IN A MIRROR,"
ETC., ETC.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WHO LET THE TRAIN GO ON WITHOUT HIM.

"WHAT do you say, guard? Stick here for three mortal hours! Not if I know it, my friend, or the deuce is in it. Stand clear, I'm out."

The guard stepped back as the speaker flung open the first-class carriage door and leaped lightly to the ground with a small valise in one hand. He was a tall, slight man, about thirty, very handsome and very bronzed.

"Good evening," he said to the guard; "it's as likely as not I don't turn up at all in two hours; I may find something to pass the time in Malverton and not go on till to-morrow. Do you know of any good hotel in the place?"

The guard's recommendation was based upon a logical inference drawn from the stranger's appearance and surroundings. He was a first-class passenger from London; he was unmistakably a gentleman and thoroughly well dressed; his travelling suit of navy blue was of the finest material; his tie fastened by a gold pin with small horse-shoe head set with diamonds, and on his right hand he wore a valuable signet ring of gold, set with one "first water diamond," surrounded with rubies; he had given a newsboy a shilling for a penny paper, bidding him keep the change, and he was now coolly tossing aside an expensive railway ticket for a whim or mere impatience; clearly, he was well off and careless of money, so the guard named the best hotel in the town, one not very far from St. Margaret's. He got a half-crown for his information, and the handsome stranger walked away towards the town at an easy swing pace, and long strides that soon brought him to the hotel

named, where he ordered a room for the night and refreshment in the coffee-room. There was one other traveller there sitting by the fire, as evidently a seafaring man as the other was unmistakably a man who had knocked about the world by land and water, and with whom therefore there was an instant freemasonry. The two fraternized, and, speaking of the accident, found they were both in the same boat, save that the Scotchman was going on by the train.

"Why, you see," said he smiling, "I'm not quite such a swell as you, sir. I'm captain in the employ of the Shaw, Savill and Albion Company, and just home from New Zealand; my ship's gone into dry dock for repairs, and so I've got rather longer leave."

"Ah, going home then, I suppose?" said the other; but there was a sudden sorrowful cadence in the soft musical tones that struck pain to the sailor's warm heart.

"Going to see my old father and mother in Dundee," he said, "in the old home; mine's in London, but my wife, bless her, spares me a bit for them."

There was a quick flash in the younger man's splendid dark eyes, a momentary quiver of the firm lips and a restless movement as of intense pain as he said: "You are married, then?"

"Lord, yes; ten years or more; it's the best thing a man can do, as soon as he can, I think," cried the skipper heartily; "don't you? Try it, my lad, for you aren't married, I take it, eh?"

"No," said the other, looking steadily into the fire. "I was—but—she was drowned."

"Ah, poor lad, forgive me. I never dreamed that. I'd ha' bitten my tongue out before I wounded ye," said the seaman, deeply distressed; "I would as sure as my name's John Mackenzie. I could see in your face that you'd had a lot of trouble, but somehow I never thought of *that* sort."

"How should you? Thank you; don't think any more of it," the younger said; "it just took me aback a little, that's all."

Was that all? Was there no untold misery, no wild passion and crushing disgrace to make the past a maddening memory in this man's passionate soul?

After a pause, however, he said, still looking into the blaze:

"It was last December twelvemonth; we had only been married the August before. Were you in England in the December of '79, and do you remember that awful Tay Bridge catastrophe?"

"Remember it?" repeated the seaman grimly, and laying his hard palm upon the other's chiselled hand. "I almost saw the train go on the bridge it never crossed."

"*My wife was in that train!*" said the other hoarsely.

There was a dead silence for many minutes; then Captain Mackenzie clearing his throat said:

"And so was I till the last station it stopped at, on my way north to the old folks; meaning to cross by ferry. I wouldn't

have crossed that spider bridge at any time, for any seaman knows the awful power of wind and wave better than all the engineer science, forsooth, in the world ; and when I heard at the station that even the ferry could not run and found what a mad gale there was, I said straight out to the other passengers in my carriage——”

“ Were there many, then ? ” said his companion quietly, as the waiter came in with their refreshments, set them on the table and withdrew.

“ Several men—it was a second-class compartment—and some ladies, three, I think. Well, I said plainly, ‘ If you’ll all take an old seaman’s advice, ladies and gentlemen, you’ll do as I do—land on the platform ; if not, why the Lord help you over that bridge, for mortal man can’t do it in the teeth of such a gale.’ ”

“ Did any one have the sense to follow you ? ” said the other with almost feverish eagerness.

“ Only one, I’m sorry to say,” returned the captain sadly ; “ as I crossed the platform I looked back to my late carriage and saw a lady jump out quickly, for the next second the train moved on. She passed near me in going out of the station, and bowed and said under her close veil, ‘ Thank you ’—a sweet young voice, too—as she vanished. How you start ! ” So he had and set his white teeth. “ But, poor lad, how could it be your wife I saved, and you not know it all this time ? ”

“ No, no—forgive my folly. It was just the mad thought. Besides she”—he drew a deep breath, determinately mastering himself—“ she was alone, you said—quite alone ? ”

“ Yes, evidently. Certainly only that one lady got out of that carriage, or any other, I believe, poor souls.”

He had been sipping his claret, and now rose up ; so did the young man.

“ Well,” said the captain, cordially shaking hands, “ we’ve met rather oddly. I shall be back home in a week, No. —, Canonbury Square, and I shall be very pleased to see you, if you’ll do us the honour to take us as you find us.”

“ You are very kind, Captain Mackenzie, to take pity on such a homeless vagrant as I am, and I will certainly do myself the pleasure of accepting your invitation. My name is St. Clare.”

They exchanged cards, and parted cordially. Looking at the one he held as he walked along, Captain Mackenzie saw that the address in the corner was the Carlton and Travellers’ Clubs.

When presently the waiter came into the coffee room the young man was pacing to and fro.

“ Is there anything worth seeing about here, waiter ? ” he said. “ I must stroll out this fine evening.”

“ Yesir ; the town—all and the market-place is very fine, and if you like to see a real handsome church, sir, and grand music, there’s St. Margaret’s just near by—a *very* igh church it is”—this dubiously.

"Suit me, then—bah! of course I know its name; the music is lovely?"

"Yes, sir; and they've got the beautifullest singer there now—the boy soloist sings all by himself, you know."

"The soloist, yes; have they? But perhaps he won't sing to-night 'by himself.'"

"Deed he will, sir, being Easter-time still; he did last Sunday, all that anthem what a gentleman made, they say, on purpose for Father Haughton last St. Margaret's Day. Oh! Master Dare'll sing, sir, no fear, and you'll be just in time for the anthem."

"All right, thanks; I'll go."

He took up his felt hat and went out; the waiter following to point out the lofty steeple that should guide him to the church. He entered at the open west door just as the last ante-anthem prayer was being intoned by the vicar, and softly passing in knelt reverently down amongst the men, rather behind a column where there was a vacant space.

CHAPTER II.

"SAINT AND SINNER."

"Is Father Haughton in and disengaged?"

The question was asked at the Clergy House door some time after evensong was over, by the stranger who had given his name as St. Clare.

"He's in, sir, some time, and at supper with the other clergy. Did you want to see him very particular?"

"Yes; as soon as he is disengaged. I am sorry to trouble him so late on a Sunday evening, but my business is imperative. Here is my card."

Gilbert gave the visitor a keen look and showed him into the library, where there burned a bright fire.

"The superior won't be long, sir," he said, and placing a chair turned up the gas and withdrew.

Not long—only five, perhaps ten minutes—but they seemed hours to the man pacing to and fro with all the miserable past gathering up around him in a black mass, with a mad tempest of passions surging within, tearing heart and soul in twain in their blind force.

The vicar, entering quietly, caught one momentary glimpse, as his visitor turned sharply, of the man unmasked; the dark eyes burning as if from some lurid fire within, the bloodless lips and set teeth, the haggard misery of that desperate, passionate face, told him at once that here was some grievous trouble to deal with—far deeper than the ordinary level. But he only met the young man half-way with cordial hand-clasp and greeting as if he had known him of old.

"How do you do—what can I do for you? I am entirely at your service."

The vicar crossed to the fireplace and sat down, indicating to his visitor the chair Gilbert had placed.

"Thank you. I have come, then, direct to you, the head of this church, for some information which you possess, because I would fain spare useless scandal, if the truth gets known through inquiries of subordinates."

"Yes?" said Dr. Haughton, lifting his searching grey eyes to the handsome face opposite, as he paused.

Wilfred St. Clare bent suddenly forward then, and said between his teeth as a man might speak on the rack:

"I come to you for my wife—you know where she is."

Schooled to self-control though the priest was by long habit, and accustomed by years of experience to hear outwardly unmoved disclosures that ranged over the whole gamut of human sin and misery, this man's demand was so startling and implied so terrible a suspicion or charge, that for one brief moment even the vicar's self-mastery was surprised into stern indignation.

"Mr. St. Clare, I do not understand your extraordinary assertion. How should I know where your wife is?"

"How! Do you mean to say that you don't know that she——" He arrested the fierce flow, and turning sharply aside, walked across the apartment, then back. "Forgive my wild words," he said hoarsely; "you mistook them, naturally. I had not one thought against your spotless honour—Heaven forbid!"

"Nor, I hope, my young friend," said Father Haughton gently, noting that bitter stress on the pronoun, "against your wife's either."

The burning blood sprang to St. Clare's bronzed cheek, but where was the instant and proud defence? Instead of it, the dark head was suddenly bowed on the mantelpiece with a smothered cry of such passionate agony as wrung the listener's very heart.

"My God! it is more than I can bear! Oh, the misery and dishonour—the black sea of shame and disgrace! And I loved her better than life or salvation—my darling! my darling!"

Before such heartbroken grief as this, that swept down the strong man's very manhood, consolation itself was dumb, deepest sympathy forced into silence for many moments, and then the vicar said very gently:

"But, my son, are you quite sure of your ground for believing in your wife's guilt? Has there been no passion and jealousy, no wild temper to blind you into a terrible mistake?"

"There has been everything to madden, if you will," said Wilfred, facing the priest with flashing eyes, "but if there were nothing else, there can be no mistake in the black fact that she left me and fled—God! that I should live to say it!—with the

very man I had forbidden her to speak to. I followed them to the station with a loaded revolver in my breast and reached it just in time to see the train moving rapidly past the platform and those two sitting at a carriage window opposite each other."

He stopped, half choking, but not now was the time for any reproof, the wise priest well knew; he could gauge the man pretty closely now—the impulsive nature with good and evil passions both as strong as undisciplined, and an uncurbed desperate temper that, roused to its full reckless force, was capable of sweeping its possessor like a tornado into the wildest crime. But to gain the least control or mastery for good over this wild, haughty spirit, this pitifully darkened soul, the priest knew he must first gain its entire confidence. He had started slightly at the mention of the train, for it suddenly brought into the foreground of his memory, as bearing on this, another sad story and sacred charge never forgotten; but he must be indeed absolutely sure that the two were one before he dare attempt to carry out that charge, given under such a solemn seal.

"And you never traced her?" he said; "never heard her fate?"

"I heard it too soon," St. Clare answered brokenly, and, sinking into a low chair near the vicar's, covered his eyes; "that train went on—on—on to the Tay Bridge. The news of that came back like wildfire, and then I remember no more. I was struck down with brain fever, and for weeks my wretched life hung on a thread. I wish to Heaven it had quite snapped," he said fiercely, lifting his haggard face and wild, lurid eyes again. "Why didn't they let me die as I wanted? Yes, I did. They let a devil live on for this night to madden again."

"Hush, hush, my son," said the vicar, laying his hand with a touch of authoritative reproof on the younger man's shoulder, "you were not fit to die, and God in His mercy spared you. Why has this night maddened you again? Nay, forgive me, but I could surely, I hope, be of some help to you if you would trust me with your full confidence."

The gentle touch, the winning voice and manner, that came from a large and intensely sympathetic nature, had rarely failed to reach a suffering human heart, and did not now, the more because as strongly as insensibly the calmer and well-disciplined nature influenced, even controlled, the tempest-tossed, utterly undisciplined one.

"I don't know," said Wilfred very low, and looking straight before him into the fire, "why I have said so much to you already, or how it is that I can lay bare my heart—worse, my bitter shame, to you. Well, well." He moved restlessly, pushed back the clustering wavy locks of bronze from his brow, then spoke again.

"I've knocked about half over the world pretty well, and led a wild, reckless life enough. I found my way back to Europe again in the late June of '79, and it was in London that I met a musical

professor and his daughter, a beautiful girl, just seventeen, whose exquisite voice he had trained for the profession ; it was in truth our mutual love of music that caused our acquaintance. I soon found that she had a cousin who was often at their apartments, and very intimate, a good-looking fellow, quite ten years my senior, and whom I at once disliked." He set his teeth now for a minute ; the mere mention of this man was unbearable. "I was jealous of him, though I dare not let Alva see it, for she too was high-spirited, passionate, proud, if not as wild-tempered as I was. I loved her madly ; she was all to me and I was her all—yes, all—she loved me then. Great Heaven ! she loved me then, I know. Though they were poor and I was well off, her father refused ; I knew at whose instance. Alva was too young, he said ; we were both too much alike in temper, and I had led too reckless a life for him to trust his daughter's happiness with such a man. 'If that is really your own idea,' I answered straight, 'you should have said so at the first. Now your wisdom comes too late.' I went away ; I got a special licence and made all my arrangements. Alva used to go out for a walk at nine before she went to her music practice. They lodged near Clapham Common, so one morning, the 10th of August it was, I had a carriage waiting near where I was sure to meet her, as I did. Well, what cannot a man do with a mere girl who loves him, and feels too the injustice of his dismissal ? I half persuaded, half, yes, carried her off in cavalier fashion to a distant suburban church, and we were married. Of course then her father had to forgive, but still he never liked me after that. I didn't care. I took my darling abroad and was happy, as I had never been before in my life. In October we came back to London."

Again St. Clare paused a little, as if gathering strength to go on.

"I won't use your patience or time much longer," he resumed, speaking more rapidly ; "her cousin came about her constantly, all in a cousinly way outwardly you understand ; but I knew better, and I put my foot upon it before long. She was young, and gay, and thoughtless ; she might flirt with any other man, I said, but not with 'dear old Gerald' as she called him. I was fretted, tortured, yet shrank from baring to so young a girl the black-hearted villain of forty she trusted ; she did not understand me, nor I perhaps her. I should have explained, been less imperious, more gentle, she more obedient, less hasty. She fiercely resented my interference, it was monstrous, groundless jealousy. I doubted her heart, her faith ; she could take care of her honour and mine, and if I were getting tired of her I had better say so. Had the villain already undermined her heart's loyalty ? Had she ever loved me as I believed, or had she been only dazzled for a time out of an earlier affection for Gerald Latimer by one younger, more brilliant, more wealthy ? Oh, the torture of those horrible fears and doubts !"

He covered his face for a minute in uncontrollable anguish, but once again the gentle touch of the priest's hand laid tenderly on the bowed head now soothed and calmed the bitter pain. He went on after a little :

"That was all in November and December. I forbade Latimer the house, forbade my wife to see him, and I took her away. She had once said she should like to see Scotland, and I took her there, just there, no further. Father, that man actually followed in a few days. I saw him in the theatre on the Saturday night before the Tay Bridge Sunday. I found the next morning that in my absence he had dared to come to our hotel, had seen Alva, had stayed some time. She did not deny it, she defiantly admitted the fact. Oh, if I could but for one moment blot out the memory of that scene or day ! I had been cleaning and reloading my little revolver, which I suppose my old out-west habit made me always keep at hand, and it lay on the table. I told her she had deceived me, had never loved me, and was false now. Heaven only knows what wild words I said, and she answered ; but she went deathly pale and cried passionately that if I chose to believe her guilty she would not stoop to deny, she wished she had died before she ever saw me, she would go back to her father, and tried to tear off her wedding ring. I remember that I was maddened, maddened—go to her cursed lover she meant, flashed through me, leaped from my lips : never alive ! I snatched up the revolver and fired. It only flashed in the pan, and my wife stood absolutely still, unhurt. I remember her face of nightmare horror as I thrust the weapon in my breast, and I remember, as in a dream, saying as I passed by her, 'For him, then, I swear, wherever and whenever I find him.' I meant it then, and I mean it now. I went out to seek for him I think, but I can't recall where I went or what I did, save that I was a long time absent, hours perhaps, I can't say, but when I came back my wife was gone." Wilfred dropped the hand that had veiled his eyes, and added hoarsely, "I learned that shortly after I went out her cousin had called 'with a telegram from her father,' the waiter said, 'but Mrs. St. Clare had left a letter for me in my desk explaining.' I looked, there was no letter, no line, it was all a lie of course to cover her flight that was pre-arranged"—the listener shook his head very slightly—"but I traced them to the station, and you know the rest of that miserable part. Ah—ten striking," he broke off suddenly, "I must not keep you."

"Only ten, nay, go on ; if it were midnight what matter ? You have now to take up from after your brain fever till this evening."

"Ah, I don't deserve your goodness and patience. Well, it was months then before I could leave my room and go abroad ; the moment I could I did. I had nothing to keep me in England, and I saw by chance in an old *Times* that even her father was dead. I had no tie, no home ; I shut up the London house and

went abroad to Italy, and I only returned a few days ago because my lawyer wanted me. All this time I had, of course, believed that my wife and—that both the fugitives had perished in the terrible catastrophe at the Tay Bridge. I left London this morning in sheer restlessness *en route* for the far north to fish out an old acquaintance I knew years ago in Texas, but the accident has detained me, and I chose to stop the night and look about me a bit. In the hotel I met an old sea captain who had been in that train, but wisely got out at the last station before the bridge, very strongly advising the other passengers to do so also on account of the gale. One young lady followed that advice; he saw her jump out and leave the station alone.”

“Ah!—and you had half thought?—Yes, I see; pardon the interruption.”

“Aye, the wild thought died; for *she* was not alone. But whether Latimer was not quick enough to follow her out and so went on to his death, or whether he somehow else escaped, for my vengeance to yet find him—all doubt as to Alva's escape was made into certainty an hour later. I went into evensong at St. Margaret's, and I had scarcely knelt down five minutes when I suddenly perceived her in the church, my wife, my one love still, despite the gulf of guilt that parts us, that must part us.”

“Hush, hush,” interrupted the vicar sternly. “Thank God that she lives, and judge her not. Even if she is guilty, are you sinless?”

“If,” repeated the other with intense bitterness, “if she were innocent would she have lived and not even written to call me back? She may be with that villain even now, but by Heaven I will know to-night, for I will find her and meet her face to face! You have one in your service who can tell me where she is if living creature can, and to him you can send me.”

“In my service,” repeated the vicar utterly surprised; “who here can know where your poor wife is?”

“Your first soprano, Eric Dare.”

“That boy!” exclaimed Dr. Haughton starting, “that—impossible.”

“That boy; she knew him, she would have trusted him with her secrets when she would none other. Where does he live?”

“I will take you to him,” said the vicar calmly. “Did you come straight here after evensong?”

“No. I went back to my hotel during the sermon, and afterwards I watched every man out of the church.” His eyes flashed.

“For the man whom you believed has wronged you?”

“Yes.”

The vicar leaned forward and deliberately laid his hand on St. Clare's breast.

“I thought so; you went back for your revolver.” How quietly he spoke!

"Yes, I did, and I mean to use it."

"Give it to me," said the vicar quietly, and as he rose stretched out his hand for the weapon. "You shall have it back to-morrow."

The other rose too, the fierce red blood dyeing his bronzed cheek hotly.

"Pardon me, no. I may need it this very night," he said between his teeth.

"Give me the revolver," repeated the priest steadily, still holding out his hand, still fixing his deep grey eyes on the other's lurid dark eyes.

They looked at each other for some seconds in deep silence, those two men, the one a Saint Paul, the other at that minute a devil; then slowly the moral force conquered, silently, surely, the voiceless power of the saint bore down irresistibly the power of evil. The man drew the weapon of murder from his bosom, and silently laid it in that open hand. Then a sweet smile came into the vicar's eyes.

"Thank you, my son," he said; "now we will go to my first soprano."

He locked up the revolver, and then the two men left the house together.

CHAPTER III.

THE DEAD SPEAKETH.

LESS than ten minutes' walk brought the two men to the neat pretty house in Orange Street, where Mary Grainger let furnished rooms to a few respectable single men, clerks mostly, in the town.

Just as they reached the gate of the little forecourt one of these lodgers, evidently, came out and respectfully saluted the vicar, whose church he attended, glancing curiously at the striking-looking stranger.

"Good evening, Father Haughton. Did you want Mrs. Grainger? She has been sent for to nurse a sick neighbour to-night."

"Thanks, no; I only wanted to see my chorister Dare. Is he up still, I wonder?"

"Oh, sir, he is always late up I fancy; any way I heard the piano in the big front parlour just now. Shall I let you in with my latch-key?"

"If you please; thanks very much."

The door was opened, the two visitants stepped noiselessly into the passage, and as they laid their hats on the little mahogany slab the priest saw that his companion's hand trembled visibly that his eyes were burning and his face deathly in its pallor; the man's whole frame was quivering from head to foot with suppressed terrible excitement and emotion.

The vicar put both hands on his shoulders, and said very low,

with an intensity of earnestness and strong appeal that was almost impassioned :

"For God's sake, Who pardons only as we pardon, listen to your heart, not your wild passions, and give your wife a hearing before you condemn her."

The bloodless lips moved ; there was no sound, not even a whisper, but that movement formed no dissent, and the vicar silently opened the door into the large front parlour. There were folding doors to the back room, one of which was slightly ajar, just unhasped, and they could hear the soft *frou-frou* of a garment, as of some one moving within ; some one who heard the footsteps, for instantly the folding door was pushed wide and a slender girl in a dark flowing morning-robe stood on the threshold—a girl—his first soprano, the fugitive wife, who, in the next moment, with wild affrighted eyes and smothered cry of agony and frantic terror, had sprung forward to the priest's side, clinging to his arm.

"Save me ! hide me ! Oh, God ! it is my husband. He will kill me unheard ; and I am innocent of the dark guilt he believes."

"Hush ! hush, my child ! I know all, and he will hear you. Fear nothing, but explain all—tell him all."

And the vicar gently but firmly unclasped those poor frantic little hands and turned away to the other room.

Whatever complex forces had drawn him on to seek this moment, Wilfred St. Clare could never have told ; passion, the thirst for vengeance, wild hope that reached even after a shadow, a mad yearning, an insatiable hungering to once more look on the loved face, even guilty though it might be ; one and all had combined into over-mastering power, which, after that one minute of stricken stillness, swept aside all but the one deathless love. He made one step forwards, and opened his arms.

"Wife ! Oh, wife ! come back to my heart, and tell me again you have the right there !"

Was this a cruel dream to mock her in the long night of despair, or a dazzling reality, of such light after darkness as she had never dared to dream of ? Like one blind she staggered forwards, to be locked to her husband's breast, heart to heart once more, to feel his hot tears on her brow, and his close, passionate kiss on her lips, in a long silence, broken only at last by the deep convulsive sobs she struggled in vain to stifle.

"Wilfred, husband, don't put me from you ! I have wronged you so terribly, but not that deepest sin—not *that*. I swear before Heaven ! believe me or not as you will, though my own wicked hand has itself written such black evidence against me. I have never swerved for one second in faith ; I have loved only you ! I have been from first to last your pure and loyal wife, so help me God !"

She had lifted her beautiful face from her husband's bosom as she spoke, meeting with the unflinching steadfastness of truth

itself, the searching intensity of his downward gaze that read her very soul, and in his eyes she read all her answer—*his* belief, his unbroken love, his forgiveness. He bowed his head and once more pressed his lips to hers, almost breaking down then.

"Oh!" he whispered at last, "this horrible long night of despair, ended now for ever! But, ah! my darling, my precious wife, I too need forgiveness."

"Hush! my heart forgave you all long months ago," the girl said softly. "But I—I was so afraid of you; I knew you believed me false to you—who else could do otherwise? I had given you such terrible right to believe it, in my mad wickedness and misery. I thought that horrible day I fled that your love was gone from me, and my heart was broken. I was utterly reckless—maddened. I only knew that I must fly before you came back; fly somewhere, anywhere. I wrote a bitter, cruel note to tell you that I should go back to my father, and go where you could not trace us. I put it in your desk."

"Alva! I never had it!"

The exclamation reached the vicar and he came quietly in again. His time to speak had come.

"Children," he said gravely, "I have something to say to you before I leave you to-night. Come here."

There was something so deeply, solemnly impressive in his face and manner, that a strange awe stole over the husband and wife, as if they stood in the presence of the dead, or an unseen spirit back from the grave—perhaps they did in that blessed hour of reunion. Who shall say that the spirit of the man who had parted these two was not hovering near, unrestful till that dying charge of restitution could be fulfilled?

Silently each obeyed the vicar as he took a seat by the fire, St. Clare leaning lightly against the mantelpiece; his young wife knelt down at the priest's feet as he spoke again.

"Do you remember, my child, the man who, last St. Margaret's Day, swooned in church during the anthem?"

"Yes," she said, a cold chill creeping over her. "I heard of it next day; a Mr. Percival, who died that night of heart disease."

"Aye; that man," said the vicar, looking straight up into Wilfred's face, "was Gerald Latimer, whom Heaven had reserved from your vengeance, to punish with its own inscrutable retribution; the sudden shock and his terror when he heard the voice in the anthem, of what he thought the spirit of the girl he had murdered, gave him his death-blow."

"Murdered?" repeated both listeners; and then the man added with an instant change of tone and softening of his dark eyes:

"And it was her voice, never to be forgotten or mistaken, and in that very anthem that told me my darling lived."

"Then, son," said the vicar gently, "in your own happiness and pardon find pardon and prayer for the poor soul that is gone to its

account. Well, I was sent for to receive his dying confession. Owing to the last sad stage of his disease, and more to the mental and physical shock he had received, his memory and coherence often failed painfully—leaving gaps—nay, almost fatally in one point : he could not name any one person, and even his own name only came back quite at the last. But he solemnly charged me if ever I could do good or make restitution to those he had so wronged, I was to break the seal of confession, so far as that purpose required it. I redeem that charge therefore now.”

He paused. Alva hid her face on his knee ; her husband moved a little, throwing his in shadow, but the vicar's grey eyes were bent steadily on the flickering flames as he resumed, in a measured, suppressed way, which only from its very quietude betrayed how much he felt. He spoke, too, as if of some one else, not present.

“The man had planned the deepest wrong from the very first, and to try and deliberately set himself to fan into fierce blaze the two haughty unmeasured tempers with which he had to deal, a task made easier by the girl's unsuspectingness of his own real feelings towards her. He followed them to Scotland, revolving many schemes to rouse an open rupture, and then, he thought, make her an easy prey. But he took a diabolical vow that if he failed in that, he would blast her name and compass her death ; if he could not gather the fruit at least he would wrest it from his rival. For that end he played spy—he took a room opposite the hotel, and watched, always himself prepared for instant flight. That Sunday, the 28th of December, he saw his rival go out, and suspected from his look that something had passed. He went out and presently called on his intended victim, whom he found in a state of mind only too ripe for his evil hopes, so far that she was maddened with passion and misery, and preparing for a flight back to her father. She told him all, or most of what had passed, and of his own danger if her husband found him, as he meant to do. The wicked plan was instantly formed. He said he would escort her to her father—she was quite unfit to travel alone, and certainly her life was not safe where she was. Remember that even then there was a strong northerly gale blowing, and that he knew the whole route from that part to Dundee, and had never believed in the stability of the Tay Bridge. On this he hinged his plans. Well, he stole the letter she had put in her husband's desk, told the hotel people that her father had telegraphed for her, and she, poor child, left the hotel with him for the station. She was in no state to notice anything, or know that he took her to the up, not down platform, and hurried her into a carriage of the Dundee train—north instead of south—alone with him ; but she as well as he saw her husband just as the train reached some speed. In the time between that and the next station she learned too well how absolutely her husband had been right and she grievously

wrong, for she was forced then to hear words from her companion which scathed her to the soul. She struck him full in the face, so strong and fiercely that he was blinded for a minute, in which she sprang to the farthest door, and dared him to stir one step or she would fling herself out. He cursed her then, and swore that if he could not have her his rival never should, and hurled at her the bitter taunt that she was lost, helplessly compromised by her flight with him. She made no answer to the cowardly taunt of her baffled enemy, save that one of them must leave the carriage at the next station. 'Not you, then,' he returned savagely as he heard the gale outside; 'not you. Go on if you would be safe, alike from me and your husband,' and before the train quite stopped he sprang out. But with the demon of murder in his heart he watched that carriage; he saw other people hurry in, but none got out, and the fated train went on to its doom. He waited, hungering for the terrible news that came all too soon (the dead speaks, remember, by my lips)—she was in it—he was her murderer; then two terrors seized this Cain in their masterful grip—the terror of remorse and the terror of the wronged man who had sworn to kill him. He fled back to England under another name, trusting for possible safety to the fact that the husband would believe both himself and the wife to be drowned. He lived on, 'as one accursed of God and man,' struggling to drown remorse in the wildest debaucheries, that soon brought incipient disease into active force. Last July he came to stop with an acquaintance at Malverton Hall, and passed St. Margaret's by chance, as the word goes. Some one outside told him there was a chorister there—the first soprano—with a wonderful voice, and this was the church festival. He went in, and—you both know the end," said the priest, quietly coming back to his own personality and theirs.

Neither spoke or moved at first; the man had listened with clenched teeth and pitiless eyes, but they softened suddenly as they met the vicar's gaze and followed it to his young wife's beautiful face as she lifted it to his.

"Yes," said Father Haughton gently, answering that mutual look, "God has had mercy on you, and should not you have like mercy on a fellow-sinner, 'even unto seventy times seven?'"

"I will try, father."

With a bright, glad smile, the vicar rose.

"Ah! that is right. I would have told you this before you saw your wife, but if you had believed in her innocence from other evidence than her own lips perhaps there might have remained a little sting behind that can never be now. I will see you both here to-morrow; there is much to arrange, since I have lost my first soprano. God keep you, children."

The church clock struck midnight as he passed out. Eastertide was over.

CHAPTER IV.

"A SWEET SONG."

THE vicar was not the man to ever speak the word out of season—he had far too much tact and judgment for such a well-meant mistake; but when he went back the next morning, he said a great many words in season to those two, the husband who had been in such error, the wife whose sin had been so far more deep. Grave, earnest, loving, but uncompromising was the faithful priest; disobedience, unbridled passion and pride, tacit deception—each and all had been there, and brought their own punishment, and he warned them that neither the bitter sufferings they had gone through nor the happiness just vouchsafed them of Heaven would be much guard against the future, unless they steadfastly and humbly set themselves to fight against the besetting sins which had so nearly wrecked body and soul.

"Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation," he said—and left them—alone for a little while.

When he re-entered the room, it was to speak of the difficulty in which Alva's assumption of the boy's identity had involved him, and which he had of course included in his reproof.

"The secret must be kept," he said, "not a suspicion must get abroad, for the scandal both to the church and your wife's repute would be irremediable. Child, child, what evil prompted you to such a daring step? What put it into your head?"

The curly head drooped in a half-shamed way. Her husband drew her within his arm.

"I had to live, father; I had a voice, and I heard of your need of a chorister. I was desperate, I knew I could play the *rôle* easily for I had always been so wild a tom-boy at home; they used to say too that I had something of a half-boyish look in my face, and a boy's *timbre* in voice. I could row, and swim, and——"

"Had learned gymnastics, *and* a very pretty little wrestling trick too, eh?" said the vicar, with an irresistible touch of dry fun.

"Oh, Father Charles!" the girl hid her crimson face against her husband's shoulder. "Wilfred taught me that for fun. Please do forget that wickedness."

"What was it, Father Haughton?" asked Wilfred smiling.

The vicar told him, and then asked Alva how she had come to be dressed in feminine attire last night.

"Ah," she said with a change of face, "I always dressed quite late and put on my wedding ring when my work was all done, and Mary never let in anybody, you know; it was a mere chance you surprised me."

"May I suggest a simple way out of our difficulty," said St.

Clare; "I mean about your lost or confiscated first soprano's sudden retirement?"

"Yes, indeed," said the vicar.

"Well, this, then. Give out, what is in fact the substantial truth, that Eric Dare has been sent for by a friend of his late father's. I shall at once take my wife away to town; we shall just call on Captain Mackenzie, and then travel till the autumn, or even spring, and then if the whole church sees her, who would dream that Mrs. St. Clare and the sometime first soprano are one? The strong likeness may make them think her a relative—possibly a sister—I will take care *not* to controvert the idea."

"Do you mean, then, to see us sometimes?" said the vicar, looking very pleased.

Husband and wife looked at each other; he spoke for both:

"Ah, father, you are our best friend in the world, and we shall be very much here, we hope; I shall buy Malverton Hall, which I hear is for private sale. Who can help us to be strong so well as you can?"

It was some seconds before the vicar could answer a word, his heart was so full of deepest joy.

* * * * *

A glorious summer evening; it is evensong at St. Margaret's Church, and baptism night; the choir are kneeling close to the font, where Father Haughton stands, to admit the little ones within the Church of Christ. There are several as usual, gentle and simple, all equal in their inheritance of salvation. The third infant placed in his arms is a beautiful dark-eyed boy, who smiles and cooes softly as he lies quietly in the strong, loving hold, and to the words, "Name this child," a rich girlish voice, mother and godmother in one, answers, "Eric Dare."

A little later, after the vicar has signed the baptism register in the vestry, he detains St. Clare and his young wife a minute or two behind the others, to say a few words; taking her tiny namesake from Nurse Mary, Alva glances in her husband's face, and as the vicar kisses their first-born son, she says softly, "We have one little cherished hope for our darling's early future, father."

"And what is that, my child?"

"That he may one day be here, what his mother was—the first soprano of St. Margaret's."

OUR DAGON'S DOWNFALL.

By TEMPLE LAURENCE.

LUMLEY FOTHERGILL was the show captain of the Royal Saxons, and the whole regiment had a gratified sense of personal pride in their creditable captain's distinguished appearance. He was tall and he was slim, his hair curled beautifully and showed no symptoms of coming off. His complexion put to the blush the complexion of most ladies, for it never got unbecomingly red and never alarmingly pale. Robust of health and strong of body was this admirable captain, and withal perfectly unspoilt by his proud position of regimental beauty. In fact, he was unconscious of the giddy height to which he had climbed, for Lumley Fothergill was of an absent turn of mind. He had eyes that saw not, and ears that heard not, very frequently, for his thoughts had a habit of travelling off on little personally conducted tours of their own, at which times he was as ignorant of what was going on under his very nose, as if his body had been in dreamland in company with his mind. He was not a poet, nor yet a painter, nor did he favour any particular cult with his especial attention. If he had a "turn" at all, it was for taking things to pieces and bewildering himself and spoiling his goods by ineffectual endeavours to put them together again. His one invention was a mouse-trap, yet another new form of that humble but useful article—but history has not recorded that it was a complete success. It seemed constructed on purpose to let the victim escape after a few struggles and a short imprisonment. Probably the shock to its system and the terrors of a brief captivity had a salutary effect on the mouse morals, but certainly it soon found itself

"Free to run away
And call again another day."

After this it can easily be credited that Lumley Fothergill was one of the kindest-hearted men living. He would have given away all he had and put himself to any inconvenience to please or oblige his fellow creatures. It is on record that he once alluded to St. Martin as "a mean cuss." Not from intentional profanity—oh! no—but from a defective knowledge of that saintly legend, and general disapproval of giving away half when you might give your whole. He overheard two giddy youths of the Saxons squabbling

over a garment one rainy night, each trying to make out it was his own property and not the other's, and the one who seemed most like losing exclaimed, loudly enough for Captain Fothergill to hear, "Oh! bother all this fuss about a shabby old waterproof. Let's chop it in two, like St. Martin's macintosh, and each take a bit. Half a cloak's better than none at all."

"Eh, what? Martin's macintosh. Well, of all the mean cusses—to spoil his own cloak and prevent any one else having it—commend me to your shabby friend Martin!" exclaimed the Beauty with a lofty scorn. But this gentle person had a fair share of medals on one side of his coat, and a Humane Society's on the other, for apathetic, lazy and absent though it was his wont to be, yet he could be vigilant and alert enough on occasion, and more ready in case of need than most of the wide-awake ones of the earth. Few people knew, and none ever heard of it from Lumley Fothergill himself, how once upon a time, when a ship was in distress and the sea ran such mountains high that the lifeboat's crew refused to peril their lives and face it, Lumley Fothergill, with flashing eyes and wind-tossed hair, sprang on to a post of vantage and from there harangued the fisher-folk and sailors with such a burst of eloquence and storm of scathing words, that those who were not touched were shamed, and followed him with contrite hearts and active hands over the perilous waves and out to the sinking ship. Time after time they went until all the crew were saved. And how Lumley Fothergill thanked them and "treated" them when their work was done, he himself having laboured as hard as any there, is it not written in the annals of the sailing and fishing folk of the little town of Lealholm-by-the-Sea?

With the fair sex the Saxons' fair captain was a universal favourite. Perhaps because he had a way of doing most things better than his neighbours did. Whatever he put his hand to turned out well, so no wonder he was admired, not alone for his good looks, but for his lawn tennis and cricket playing, his dancing, riding, driving, even his skill with divers musical instruments, which surpassed the performances of most other people; but he was not a brilliant conversationalist, he would listen for any length of time but he seldom talked. Who knows how much of his success with the feminine half of the world might have been due to this? The fair creatures love to prattle themselves, and an interested listener may be more precious in their opinion than the most brilliant of talkers. Lumley Fothergill always contrived to *look* interested; he paid the profoundest attention to even the most rambling *raconteuses*, and he wore a plaintive expression of the deepest sympathy with every thrilling experience or worrying misadventure that was confided to him. It was generally supposed by his brother officers that when he put on that particularly touching and interested air he did not hear a single word of the narrative being unfolded for his benefit, but that he was

engaged in calculating the price of oats, or speculating on what the "caterer" would provide for dinner, or wondering what practical joke Mullooly, his ingenious Irish soldier servant, might have played when packing up his portmanteau, and whether per-adventure he had arrived to "dine and sleep" without any attire but a sleeping kit! But *que voulez-vous?* Men were deceivers ever. As to falling in love, such a thing never seemed to enter Captain Fothergill's imagination. He openly avowed he could not afford such an expensive luxury as a wife. He could not marry a penniless lass, he said, and he would not marry a rich one. He had theories which he was fond of airing for the use and benefit of his brother officers, and one of these was that a well-dowered bride was a worse investment than a poor one.

"If I were compelled to marry," he would unkindly observe—"if I could not avoid it, I would rather marry a girl like Mrs. Pettytose, who is the daughter of a penniless curate and the eldest of fifteen, than a rich man's child with £30,000 in her pocket. Mrs. Pettytose is a right-down pauperess who has been accustomed to skin flints and pare cheeses all the days of her life, and long practice makes the Pettytose sixpence go as far as Mrs. Dives' half-crown, whereas Miss Dives, the heiress, having been used to living at the rate of £30,000 a year in the paternal mansion, naturally wishes to continue in the same style of ease and comfort, and expects to do it, too, on the £30,000 she brought as her dowry. Little advantage accrues to her spouse from that ample pocketful, for Miss Dives lavishes it right and left, and not only her fortune but his little all into the bargain, from sheer inability to live tidily on a little. No, no—single blessedness *is* blessedness, but take my word for it, you fellows, a wife halves the best of all your joys and more than trebles your expenses."

So this base and petted favourite of the fair sex would affirm with a wise wag of his nicely curled head. But there is a time for all things, as the Preacher considerably tells us, and there came the time when this mocking one fell in love. The regiment in due course proceeded on foreign service, to one of those charming climates where the unfortunate Briton is baked by a burning sun in summer, and made a cripple for the rest of his life by the rheumatic pangs of damp and soaking winters. The charms of colonial ladies have been proclaimed from east to west and from north to south, so I need only say that the feminine colonists who greeted the Royal Saxons on their arrival were every whit as fascinating as the regiment had been led to expect. Hospitality was literally poured over the Saxon warriors. Genial papas beamed upon them and begged them to consider the family mansion as their own. Amiable mammas killed the petted calf, the plumpest fowl, the cherished duck, and entreated the red-coated strangers to come and feast upon their dainties. So to speak, the colonial pig ran about ready cooked, with knives and forks stuck

conveniently in his choicest morsels, and squeaked invitations to the strangers to "eat him if they pleased." Lawn tennis revels set in; picnics were organized, and all went merry as a marriage bell—that marriage bell which perhaps these ladies longed to hear! True, the wives of the ineligible officers—the Mrs. Pettytose and Co.—did not participate quite so freely in these banquetings and junketings, and said bitter things accordingly, but ladies—bless them!—their minds are not so large as ours; and if they declared that Mrs. Van this and Mrs. De that only asked the mateless bachelors, the youngest, simplest and most defenceless boys to her daughter-filled bower, and proffered nothing but the bleak hospitality of a visiting-card to all the married men and their wives, why perhaps it was not so. We all know what a fertile imagination can do, and the cautious parents were hardly likely to offend such powerful engines as Madame the Colonel's lady, Mrs. the Adjutant, and little Pettytose's cheery but bitter little helpmate.

Conspicuous amongst the charming bevy of ladies in this distant land were Mrs. and the Misses Despencer. They were of French extraction, of an old Huguenot strain, they said, and their forefathers sailed from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes to settle as far from their native country as they could get. It was curious that Mrs. Despencer should have so fine a brogue, a pure Milesian accent; for she repudiated with scorn the very slightest connection with the Emerald Isle. She was French, she said, from the crown of her neat black head to the toe of her pointed shoe. Nothing but the purest French. Two children blessed this lady in her widowhood, and like Cornelia, she described them in conversation as her jewels, or when excited "jools." Rénée was the eldest "jool," and Delia the younger—"Dahlia" her mother would exclaim in incautious moments, but what did it matter? "A rose by any name," &c., &c., and Delia was indeed "Queen Rose of the rose-bud garden of girls."

"Tall, slender, like a lily fair,
With eyes of blue, and raven hair,

the prettiest girl in the wide colony was Delia Despencer. Not from her mother did this beauty come. The vivacious widow was tall and thin, and raven-haired certainly, but there the resemblance ended, for she was sallow, thin-lipped, small-eyed, and scant of locks. Active—oh, yes, running hither and thither like a girl in her teens, and riding, dancing, and playing lawn tennis like the youngest kitten. Rénée was unlike her mother, too. She was handsome, but of a slumbrous, languorous type of beauty, with eyelashes inches long, and hair like the Cenci's, brown with a tinge of auburn. No sooner did Mrs. Lörelei Despencer set her long and narrow black eyes on the Saxons' handsome captain, than she began to comb her flowing hair and sing her most tuneful ditties *après la mode Lörelei*. I speak figuratively, of course, for

the widow's locks were not such as a lady would comb in public, and of voice, as far as singing went, she possessed no vestige. The family Despencer lived in a cottage slightly bigger than a band-box, a cottage that bore the imposing name of *La Rochelle*, for Mrs. Despencer was, as she delighted to inform any who would listen, an ardent admirer of Huguenot Henry; and her family, she explained, had followed the white-plumed hero through divers difficulties and in sundry fights. In moments of confidence she would even reveal that he was the direct ancestor of herself and her two dear "jools." How, scarcely appeared, for she had the art of entangling her bewildered hearer in a genealogical maze, from whence he escaped with only a vague conception that his hostess and her daughters were somehow or other of royal descent, and might at any moment turn into real princesses. Lumley Fothergill was a willing wanderer in this wonderful maze, for while he listened to Mrs. Despencer as she descanted on the family history, and wore his air of touching and tender interest meantime, his mind was far from Henry of Navarre and any of that *gay galère* and hovered about the lovely Delia and the languorous *Rénée*, who sat near their mother under the verandah's ample shade, and lifted their long-lashed eyelids from time to time and smiled confidentially and appealingly upon him, as if entreating him not to laugh at their parent's rodomontades. Never before had Lumley Fothergill strayed so near to that whirlpool yclept love, and his only safeguard on its brink was that he now found himself between two whirlpools of equal power. *Rénée* was his Scylla and Delia his Charybdis, and sometimes Fate whirled him towards the one, and he felt as if all were over, but then a straw turned his course and hurled him towards the other. To put it vulgarly, he felt how happy could he be with either!

La Rochelle lay blazing in the full heat of the antipodean sun. It was afternoon, and the ladies had retired to their inner sanctums to sleep some of the most broiling moments away, when Lumley Fothergill's smart little cart came bowling down the long and flat expanse of the sun-baked road and made for the neat little band-box with its tiny drive and its miniature grounds. He had had a sleepless night; thoughts, not mosquitoes, had kept him awake, and during the long night watches he had made a resolution, come to a decision, and was now driving towards *La Rochelle* with a fierce and determined expression on his handsome countenance, prepared to carry out his intention to take the momentous step that for years he had been trying warily to avoid. Jealousy was the spur that drove our gallant friend along. The regiment had given a little "at home" at their breezy camp on the hill the previous evening, and to Captain Fothergill's intense disgust and surprise, not one single dance would Delia Despencer spare him. That he, the regimental beauty, should ask and be refused, and

have to go with empty card away, was treatment he had never before experienced, and it was more marvellous in his eyes than all the wonders of the world. True, there was *Rénée*, and one *Despencer* damsel valed every whit as divinely as the other, but it had suddenly dawned on the *Fothergill* mind that *Rénée's* tawny locks and beautiful eyes were nothing in his sight, and that it was *Delia*—*Delia* who flouted him, and would not give him a single dance, who was his ladye, his love, his guiding star! *Rénée* was only the rose's sister; she was nothing more to him than a pale shadow, a humble imitation, a sort of feeble copy of her peerless relative, he thought spitefully to himself, whilst jealousy gnawed at his heart and made him supremely silent, miserable and cross. But *Delia* danced on in apparent unconsciousness and serenest bliss, improving the shining hours with a gorgeous *Hussar*, a glittering stranger with plenty of money, a childish face, and "an empty head," as Captain *Fothergill* bitterly exclaimed when he was gyrating savagely round the room with the under-rated sister.

Rénée looked at him oddly.

"Poor Mr. *Bethune*! What makes you say such cruel things about his head? It is a very nice-looking head," she said compassionately.

"Oh, of course, women always think anything rich is 'nice-looking,' but he looks a gaping idiot—that's what *I* think," answered the goaded Saxon with a good deal of temper, as he watched the faithless *Delia* with a jealous glare.

"Wretched Mr. *Bethune*! But don't tell mamma about his empty head; she is fondly in love with him, or perhaps with his riches, as you nicely suggest, and it would be a dreadful blow to hear he was 'a gaping idiot,'" and *Rénée* laughed merrily, as if so witty a description had never been heard before.

But though Mr. *Bethune* might be an idiot, he had the effect of giving the strong-minded Captain *Fothergill* a sleepless night, and of working him up to a state bordering on distraction.

A grinning brown imp, attired as a "buttons," and bearing a startling resemblance to the monkey of the country, appeared in the open doorway as Captain *Fothergill* drove up to the modest entrance of *La Rochelle*, and stood smirking impishly on the verandah.

"Are the ladies in?" asked our hero imperiously, expecting no reply but "yes."

"*Missee* *Spencer* in bed; taken her best frock off. *Missee* *Rénée*, too; call it not at home. *Missee* *Deely* walking out," answered the creature with the widest of grins.

"Ah—well, then, I have a note to write, so I shall just go into the drawing-room. No, you need not tell Mrs. *Despencer*, for it is—um—it is a message to Miss *Delia*, not to her—you need not wait, Sam, I will leave my note on the table," and so saying, and

graciously bestowing a tip on the brown and beaming infant, Lumley Fothergill stepped softly through the window into the neat little drawing-room.

It was not a rich woman's nest, no costly *bric-à-brac* or expensive toys were there, but it was pretty enough with its artistic rags and its draped dusters of limp Liberty silk. Delia's work-basket lay open on a milking-stool—a milking-stool that wore a large yellow bow coquettishly planted on one of its short fat legs. It was Delia's own particular nook in that little nest, and the milking-stool her especial pet. Captain Fothergill drew a letter from his pocket, looked lovingly at it, and then after glancing suspiciously round to see that the imp was not lurking in ambush to watch his proceedings, he tucked the note into the yellow bow and secured it there with a pin, which he purloined from the sacred precincts of Delia's fairy-like basket. That done, he stole softly back to the verandah, regained his trim cart and drove leisurely off down the bleached and scorching road. The heat was intense, but what are hunger or thirst, or heat or cold, or any of these mundane ills to those whom Eros has touched with his magic arrow? they are oblivious of everything and all the world contains, or fate can do, save only where the beloved one is concerned. The clap-clap of the horse's hoofs rang through the summer stillness long after the retreating cart had diminished to the tiniest speck on the straight white road, and the imp stood out in the blazing sunshine leaning on the neat white gate, regardless of sunstrokes or of freckles, for the thick roof of his African head and his useful ebony complexion were as impervious to one as to the other, but when the last sound had died away, and the cart was completely invisible in the distance, he crept on the tips of his toes through the open window, and began to look about in the little drawing-room for the letter Captain Fothergill had left. Quickly as a monkey he pounced on the hiding-place, and grinned with mischievous glee as he discovered the missive securely pinned to the big yellow bow.

"Misse Deely, she box my ears this morning," observed the infant reflectively to himself, and then picking up the stool bodily, he trotted off with it down the long and matted corridor on which the bedrooms opened. Apparently Mrs. Despencer was like that oft-quoted countrywoman of hers, who did not count her lackey as a man but only as a thing, a machine, or an animal, for this miniature footman walked straight to his mistress's bed-chamber, opened the door and marched in without even the ceremony of a knock. On two neat white beds lay Mrs. Despencer and Rénée; their pretty pink cotton dresses hung on pegs above their heads and their reposing forms were enveloped in loose white wrappers. Rénée was dozing over a book, but her mother, with her toes pointed towards the ceiling and her head propped high on a frilled pillow, was enjoying an unmistakable slumber. The imp went up to her bearing the milking-stool carefully aloft, like some precious

article in a procession. "Missee," he said softly, and gently plucked at the dressing-gown. Rénée's heavy eyelids slowly unclosed, but there was no sign of awaking on Mrs. Despencer's part; on the contrary she emitted a sharp and defiant little snore as if to threaten any one who tried to drag her back from the land of nod.

"What do you want, Sam? What have you brought that milking-stool out of the drawing-room for? Don't wake your missis, bring me anything that has come," said Rénée sleepily, and she held out her plump white hand. But the imp had other views. He patted his mistress rather roughly on the arm and in an instant the long, narrow black eyes unclosed, the lady's wits returned and her sharp voice exclaimed:

"What are you wanting now, Satan? If it is the front door bell say I'm out—gone to town."

The imp grinned. "No, missee, the captain gone, I said you were out; he wrote a note for missis and left it on this stool." But the quick lean fingers of Mrs. Despencer had already detached it from the bow and crushed it up in her hand, and she signed to the imp to take away the stool and leave the room.

"What is it, mother? Another invitation?" asked Rénée with languid suspicion in her voice and eyes.

"Invitation indeed. No such thing," answered Mrs. Despencer testily. "If they aren't the stingiest regiment I ever met, giving one nothing but a sandwich dance once in a quarter, and me put to the expense of living close to a ravenous camp, and paying me fowls, and me meat, and me butter and eggs three times as dear as I'd do in a town; just in the hope that they'd give us a jaunt now and then"—and with a grunt of disgust at her injuries, the elder lady turned her head towards the wall and fell to studying the outside of the letter she held crumpled in her hand.

Lumley Fothergill was in that state of feverish excitement when perpetual motion seems the only balm a troubled spirit can find. He drove away down the sun-baked road that looked as bare and bleached as a vulture-picked bone, and on and on until his poor servant nearly dropped off his narrow perch behind him, exhausted with fatigue and sun. He drove until he reached Peterstown, the end of all things on that fiery furnace of a road, and there he stopped to dine and rest his horse. But not for long could he stay, the craving for perpetual motion soon set in again, and after a slender meal and a brief rest for man and beast, he was bowling back along the flat white road towards Briesberg, lighted now by a silvery moon in place of the pitiless sun. Mrs. Despencer's bandbox cottage by no means lay in the direct route to Captain Fothergill's quarters, but he made a considerable detour and managed to pass it as the church clock was striking ten. Yes, there they all were, sitting out in the verandah with coffee cups and white dresses shining plainly in the moonlight, and laughter and ladies' voices

ringing on the flower-scented air, and men's deeper tones mingling with them and laughing too. "Great coarse, horse laughter," as Lumley Fothergill described it to himself with deep disgust and scorn.

"By George! there's one beast stepping through the open window into the lamp-lit room. It's that empty-headed fool Bethune, as I'm a sinner," exclaimed the savage Saxon as he speeded by.

"Any letters for me, Mullooly?" asked Captain Fothergill next morning as his servant rattled in with his cans of water and his stir-up cup of steaming tea.

"No, sor, no letters—only a note."

"Here, give it me at once. Confound you! Why don't you bring my letters as soon as they come?" ejaculated the usually patient captain with an asperity that startled the dawdling Mullooly and sent him skipping to his master's bedside with a pink and delicately fragrant note in his huge paw. With trembling fingers Lumley Fothergill tore it open, to rush with as little delay as possible on his impending fate:

"Come," it said. "Come at 12."

"Your own,

"CORDELIA."

That was written on the pink and blushing page and not a word beyond.

"Thank heaven she was only fooling that idiot Bethune," was his pious exclamation as Captain Fothergill sprang up like a giant refreshed, and began to decorate for the presence of his ladye love, for alas!—how are the mighty fallen!—that note he pinned to the milking-stool's fat little leg contained nothing less than the offer of Lumley Fothergill's hand, heart, regimental pay and modest private fortune to Delia Despencer, rapturously described as his lily, his ladye, his all in all; but addressed outside as "Delia" only. "I never knew her lovely name was Cordelia," said the lover to himself as he whistled and sang through his toilet. "What a delicious and musical name it is—*Cordelia mia*," and straight he burst into Italian song.

Mortal eyes never beheld what happened in La Rochelle at noon that day, at least not mortal eyes set in white faces; but somehow, whether through Sam's malign agency or not I cannot say, but the details of that sacred interview leaked out in some mysterious manner, and convulsed the whole of the Royal Saxons with mingled wrath and laughter. At the hour appointed the gallant captain hied him to the lady's bower, arriving there with military punctuality. Gaily did he drive up through the diminu-

tive garden of La Rochelle, spring lightly to the ground, and follow the smirking "Satan" into the shaded and dimly-lighted house. The verandah awnings were down, and excluded every ray of sun from the cool and flower-scented drawing-room; the *persiennies* were closed over the windows too, and the light was more than "dim religious," it was almost *nil*. A slender and girlish figure was just discernible in Delia's nook, bending over a *jardinière* of ferns and flowers that stood in her sacred corner. The figure looked as if gowned in pink, and pink was Delia's own favourite and distinctive colour.

"Delia, my own," whispered the happy lover interrogatively.

The figure stirred and fluttered, and a faint "yes" fell on the stillness, in dove-like tones. The fortunate Lumley advanced, and in a minute the slender pink thing was enfolded in his arms. But what is this that as his eyes grow accustomed to the gloom the enraptured Saxon sees? A slim and youthful figure certainly, and a black head nestling on his coat; but whose face is this that turns confidingly to his—*whose* sallow face is that, whose narrow slit-like eyes? A Delia's perhaps they may be, but not *his* Delia's. No—a thousand times no; they are what he angrily describes to himself as "that infernal old widow's."

And what happened next? Can you ask? A man who could not kill a mouse would hardly break a lady's heart. He struggled to escape, of course, and essayed over and over again to explain; but at the most delicate suggestion, the slightest hint of a mistake, Mrs. Despencer wept and howled and talked of her slighted affection, her broken heart, her love at first sight, the written proposal, her injured prospects, and a breach of promise all in a breath. Her child Delia was engaged to Reggie Bethune, and had been since she was twelve years old, and everybody in the place knew it, so how could she think the proposal was meant for her? It was shameful, scandalous and a crying sin, and thus between hysterics and cajolings on the widow's part, and a dumb despair that tore like eagles at his heart when he found his Delia gone for ever, Lumley Fothergill was vanquished and led like a lamb to the altar, with his ancient mutton frisking bride-like at his side. But the Royal Saxons lost their show captain.

In one brief month after the honeymoon absence did Mrs. Fothergill, the bride, embroil herself in a dozen battles, and raise a hundred teacup storms. She fought with Mrs. Colonel, and called the colonel names to his shocked and sunburnt face. She was at daggers drawn with the pair of Pettytose, and had split up the regiment pretty equally into two camps—those who would be civil to her for Lumley's sake, and those who wouldn't have anything whatever to say to her. So Lumley Fothergill—"poor old Lumley" with his comrades now—regretfully exchanged into another regiment, and bade the Saxons good-bye for ever.

Mrs. Fothergill lives in India. She likes the life, and the

climate suits her, she says ; and he, poor Lumley, whenever we have a little war he is a sure volunteer, and the worse the climate the more anxious he is to be sent to it. The crop of medals is growing surely and steadily larger on his weather-beaten coat. His curls are becoming thin and grey now, and he is a saddened, chastened-looking man, silent and dull too ; but no one takes much note of that in the society of his wife, as that volatile and voluble lady chatters enough for a dozen, and if he wished to speak there would be no chance for him when she is present. His daughter (!) Delia married her gay Hussar, and does not seem to mind his empty head. *Rénée*, dreamy *Rénée*, with the large brown pathetic eyes, espoused an Indian official, a knight with an alphabet of letters after his name, and is wealthy, happy and, alas ! *fat*, and as every year rolls by she grows more and more indolent, and more and more fat.

LOVE AND I.

Love laid his heart to mine
To still its sudden pain,
For peace is never more
Where once his head has lain.

He cast his bow aside,
And wide the arrow flew.
"Poor heart, poor heart!" he cried.
"I will not shoot it through."

Beside my feet he knelt,
And laid his head to rest,
Against the eager beats
That stirred my aching breast.

There, like a shield he knelt,
Without or bow or dart;
So that none else might heed
The beating of his heart.

I stooped and kissed his eyes,
And knew that he was fair;
And, at my feet, I saw
His arrow lying there.

I raised it in my hand,
I held it up on high,
And plunged it in my heart,
Without or moan or cry.

Then came a sudden pain,
A sudden fear and doubt ;
"Alas ! poor heart !" he said,
"I cannot pluck it out."

"I would have spared you so
Some little share of pain,
Now you must bear it all
Until I come again."

So love went out alone,
The while the arrow stayed,
For only love can heal
The wounds that love has made.

Kasauli.

G. BUTT.

THE EVENT OF OUR LIVES.

By FAYR MADOC,

AUTHOR OF "THE TEST OF CLEVERNESS," "THERESY," "MARGARET JERMINA," ETC.

MY wife and I were a very happy couple. We loved each other, and we had two children, who were as pretty and healthy and nice-mannered as parents could wish. We were also rich, and when one has love and wealth, not counterbalanced by bad health or bad temper, one has pretty nearly everything that can render life delightful. We had, indeed, only one subject of complaint: sometimes we found existence a trifle monotonous.

"I think," my wife would say, yawning—"I really do think life is too uneventful. It is quite stupidly flat. Why doesn't something interesting happen?"

"Well, what should you like?" I would rejoin. "Shall I hire an assassin to stab me at the opera? or a gipsy to steal the children? or——"

"Nonsense!" cried she, laying her pretty hand on my lips. "Of course I don't mean anything fearful and hideous like murder and kidnapping. I don't know what I mean; anything would do, so long as it was exciting and unusual."

This, however, was the one thing in which I couldn't gratify her, for one can't buy unusual events by the ounce, or keep them bottled in one's cellar. So I tried to assuage her longing with philosophy.

"We are both young," I said. "Who knows what may happen before we keep our golden wedding? We must wait."

"Wait!" exclaimed my wife. "Yes, the end of the world is coming, but we shan't live to see it."

Time, however, proved that I was right. One day she received the following letter from her only brother, in Australia:

"MY DEAR LUCY,

"I have just nursed back to life, after a long and dangerous brain-fever, my great friend, George Stormont; and as the doctors concur in saying a sea-voyage is the best thing for him, I mean to put him on board the 'Mount Vermont,' on the 28th, and ship him off to England. His only relation, a married sister, lives in Scotland, so I am desiring him to go straight to you, as I am sure

you will be willing to put him up for a short time till he is equal to a long railway journey, and I feel confident you and Frank will pay him all the attention you can for my sake.

"If he recovers on the voyage you will find him sociable and agreeable and up to everything; but the doctors tell me he may not be quite himself for some months, and if so you will see him as he is now—a silent individual, rather eccentric, preferring solitude, and always mooning about the place and wandering into rooms where he has no business. But one must excuse the vagaries of an invalid, and I trust that you and Frank will bear with him, as I said before, for my sake.

"No more now, as I am busy with my usual avocations, and extra busy looking after Stormont.

"With much love to you all,

"Ever your affectionate brother,

"EDGAR ARROWSMITH."

"P.S.—Stormont will arrive a fortnight after this letter."

He came, however, that evening. We were astonished, but we hastened to welcome him, and found him in the study—a small, spare man, with a short dark beard, and cropped black hair. He rose slowly from the easy chair in which he was seated, and looked at us foolishly.

"We are very glad to see you, Mr. Stormont," said I, taking his hand. "How are you? Better, I hope."

"Not much," said he in a wearied tone, and putting his hand to his head.

"Country air will soon set you up," said I. "How did you leave Edgar?"

"Edgar wrote you were coming by the 'Mount Vermont;' but surely she isn't in yet?" remarked Lucy.

"I got off earlier than I had dared to hope," said Stormont. "In the 'Monte Rosa' there was a berth, and it was thought better I should not delay."

"That was the mail which brought Edgar's letter?" said Lucy.

"Yes," said Stormont.

After that he relapsed into silence, and we could only extract monosyllabic answers from him. We saw that he was fatigued, and I presently showed him to his rooms—two apartments on the ground floor, which Lucy's thoughtfulness had provided.

"My wife fancied you might like to be saved the stairs," I said. He thanked me warmly.

"It was very kind of Lady Dennis," he said. "I sleep badly, and often take a walk in the early morning, so this will suit me exactly, as I shall be able to leave the house without disturbing any one."

"Take care none of my servants mistake you for a burglar," said I, laughing.

"Oh, they won't do that," he returned, with a smile.

So I left him, and as he was very quiet and taciturn, and his brain evidently still extremely weak, Lucy and I found that his presence made very little difference to us.

"Don't mind me," he said, the next day. "I feel exhausted, and conversation tires me. But I am not ill, and you will please me best and serve me most if you will let me go my own way and not concern yourselves about me."

So we left him to follow his own devices, and as he preferred to have his meals in his own room we saw very little of him.

"It's too bad," Lucy said to me. "I did think Mr. Stormont would have been an exciting element. I hoped we should have had the house crowded with nurses and brain specialists, and that perhaps he would have gone suddenly mad, and you would have restrained him in some heroic manner. Instead of which he is as humdrum as possible. At least, he might have gone a *little* crazy."

"Well, he may yet," said I. "He has only been here a week to-day."

That evening Johnson demanded an interview of me.

"Well, Johnson?" I said to this old and faithful domestic.

"I'm not easy about Mr. Stormont, Sir Francis," said Johnson, carefully looking over his shoulder, though he had as carefully closed the door behind him when he entered.

"What about Mr. Stormont?" I inquired.

"He's an uncommonly queer gentleman, Sir Francis," replied Johnson. "Several nights I've found him wandering about my pantry, and yesterday he frightened Mrs. Rowe out of her wits by coming in when she and me was holding a confidential communication in the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Rowe's heart is weak, Sir Francis."

I couldn't help smiling, for it was no secret where the weakness in Mrs. Rowe's heart tended.

"What explanation did Mr. Stormont offer?" I asked.

"None, Sir Francis," said Johnson. "He put his hand to his head and looked bewildered, and then went off. He's been caught upstairs by the girls just the same, and Jane met him at your dressing-room door. And it makes it worse because he walks so soft. We ain't none of us angry with the poor gentleman, Sir Francis, but we think he's stark mad, and we think there'll be murder if he ain't looked sharp after."

"I hope not, Johnson," I said. "This is just what Mr. Arrow-smith prepared us for; his words were: '*he goes mooning about the place, and wandering into rooms where he has no business.*' I can't turn my brother-in-law's friend out of my house because he's odd."

"I hope nothing may come of it, Sir Francis," said Johnson solemnly.

"I trust not," said I. "Mr. Stormont will go soon. Meantime,

don't let any one frighten her ladyship. There is nothing murderous in a tendency to poke into strange places."

Nevertheless, I felt somewhat uneasy, and watched my guest narrowly. But there was nothing in his demeanour to warrant my apprehensions, and I presently forgot Johnson's revelations, and ceased to lie awake at night listening for sudden shrieks.

Stormont had been with us a fortnight when we went to a ball at the Duke of Bengal's. Lucy donned her diamonds, and I thought she looked very beautiful in them, and told her so. I was just kissing her when we suddenly found that Stormont was in the room. Lucy blushed prettily at being caught in her husband's arms, and I daresay I grew hot.

"We are going to a ball," I stammered. "I was just telling my wife her diamonds became her."

"So I heard," said Stormont. "May I look at your diamonds, Lady Dennis?"

He approached and gazed admiringly at her necklace and earrings.

"Beautiful!" he said, several times. "Diamonds of the first water! I know something about diamonds; my great uncle was a diamond merchant."

"If you were going with us, you would see far finer diamonds than mine," said Lucy. "The duchess has diamonds that are absolutely priceless, and such a quantity! She has them sewn on to her dress, and two detectives always close to her."

"I wonder she dares walk about in such precious things," observed Stormont. "At large parties it is impossible to say what bad characters may not slip in."

"Well, as a matter of fact, she doesn't walk about," said Lucy. "A few years ago she hurt her spine out hunting, and she is always on the sofa."

"Wouldn't you like to come with us, my dear fellow?" said I.

"Thank you, I think not," he replied, plaintively; "I *should* like it, but I fear the noise and heat would hurt my head. Thank you, Lady Dennis, for letting me see your treasures. I hope you keep them carefully?"

"Oh, yes! Frank keeps them in his strong-box, and when we travel they go to the bank," she replied. "Frank will lock them up to-morrow as safe as a church."

"To-morrow!—not till to-morrow?" exclaimed Stormont in a horrified voice.

"No," said she; "why should he tire himself? Nobody could take them out of our room."

At this moment the carriage was announced, and I carried Lucy off. It was a good ball, and the duchess lay in state, covered with superb diamonds and watched by acute and intelligent functionaries. In the course of the evening a gentlemanlike stranger, with a long fair beard and rather long fair hair addressed me and asked

if I could point out Sir Francis Dennis. I told him that I was the gentleman in question, and he bowed courteously.

"You will excuse the liberty I took," he said; "but I believe my old friend, George Stormont, is staying with you. I only heard of his whereabouts to-day, and at cockcrow I start for the Continent, or I should have called to see him. Perhaps you will say that you met Colonel L'Estrange."

I was pleased with the colonel's manner, and we entered into conversation, and after a time he begged me to present him to the duchess. This I did willingly, knowing that the poor duchess' chief pleasure lay in talking with agreeable people, and after that I lost sight of him.

It was late when we left, and on reaching home we found Stormont walking in the drive, smoking. He followed the carriage quickly and helped Lucy to alight, and we stood talking in the hall for a few minutes.

"And the duchess and her diamonds?" inquired Stormont presently.

"The duchess and her diamonds were all there," said I. "By the way, Stormont, I met a friend of yours, a Colonel L'Estrange, and I introduced him to the duchess, who, I understand, was charmed with him."

"He is a very nice fellow," said Stormont; "quite a ladies' man. I wonder what he was doing here? However, I mustn't keep you, Lady Dennis; you must be very tired."

We went upstairs, and, as usual, Lucy's diamonds were left on her dressing-table. We had done this so repeatedly that it never occurred to us to do differently, notwithstanding the astonishment that Stormont had expressed. But we committed the indiscretion once too often. The next morning Lucy's exquisite diamonds were gone.

An unusual event had happened at last, but it was too serious for joking. Lucy was too miserable to get up, and at length I left her to her maid and went down to breakfast alone, pondering what steps I should take. I had hardly poured out my coffee when Stormont came in. He held an open letter in his hand, and seemed quite alert and cheerful.

"Good morning," he began eagerly. "I've heard from my sister. She is in London; has come up on purpose to meet me and wants me to join her to-day."

"Indeed," said I absently. "Your sister—Mrs. Macdonald—in town—oh!"

Stormont looked at me, surprised.

"Anything the matter?" he said. "Lady Dennis not well?"

"Well, yes, something *is* the matter," said I. "Something deucedly disagreeable has happened. My wife's diamonds have been stolen."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Stormont.

He was so taken aback that he literally fell into a chair and sat there staring at me.

"Those diamonds?" he said at last. "Those splendid diamonds? I have no words. *Did* you lock them up?"

"No," I replied, "I've been a confounded fool. But the diamonds were close to us and we don't sleep heavily."

"Whom do you suspect?" asked Stormont.

"No one," I said. "All my servants have been with me for long. Some one must have been secreted in the house."

"And what are you going to do?" he asked. "Can I do anything in town? I must go up by the 3.15."

We discussed the subject all the morning, and Stormont's indignant interest was very consolatory, and when Lucy appeared, she was greatly cheered by his sympathy and hopefulness. He was certain that the rogues would be taken and the diamonds recovered.

"You are very sanguine," said she. "You seem quite well to-day, Mr. Stormont."

"I feel much better," he replied. "Joy is a fine doctor; and the expectation of seeing my sister has made another man of me. Then this atrocious burglary excites me to a pitch I can't describe. Lady Dennis, you *must* recover your diamonds. I shall run down on Saturday to hear the news. A talk will be so much more satisfactory than letters."

I drove Stormont to the station. By his advice I had not called in the local police, but telegraphed to London for a detective, and I should meet him by a train which would arrive soon after the 3.15 departed.

"By the way," said Stormont, as we stood waiting on the platform, "about Colonel L'Estrange—what was he like?"

"About your height," I said. "Thin and fair, with a long beard and longish hair—not military-looking at all."

A very peculiar expression came over Stormont's face, and he whistled softly.

"My dear fellow," he said, "that's your burglar! How these rascals get to know things passes my comprehension, but somehow they do. I *have* a friend—a Colonel L'Estrange—but he is stout and extremely dark, and wears a moustache only. Depend upon it, that fellow hoaxed you. I wonder he didn't pay his attention to the duchess's diamonds also."

So he had. A gentleman came up at the moment, and after shaking hands said excitedly:

"Heard the news, Dennis?"

"Only my own, Shaw," I replied dismally. "My wife's diamonds have been stolen."

"By Jove!" cried Shaw. "And the duchess lost twenty of her finest diamonds last night—cut off her dress—while the detectives stood by."

We told him about L'Estrange, and he listened with interest.

"We think it is a celebrated burglar of the name of Paxton, *alias* Grubb," he said, lowering his voice. "That's what the police think. They say no other man could have done it."

"I thought Paxton was safely out of the way," said Stormont. "Surely I remember hearing of him when I was a lad. Wasn't he concerned in the great diamond-robbery at Grey Towers in '69?"

"He was," replied Shaw, "but he's on the loose again now, and the police have been watching him. A fortnight ago Mrs. Howard lost her dressing-bag, with £2,000 worth of jewels in it. Paxton was suspected and traced to Canterbury, then gave his pursuers the slip and disappeared."

"He has probably been lying *perdu* in the neighbourhood," said Stormont, as the train came up. "Dennis, write to me at Morley's if I can help you in the least. *Au revoir*, till Saturday. Thank you beyond words for all your kindness."

That evening as we sat at dinner, Mr. Stormont was announced. I rushed out. But the Stormont who stood before me, with Edgar Arrowsmith's letters in his hand, was not the man who had gone to town that afternoon. In a moment I realized the truth. Stormont the First was Paxton the burglar!

Certainly a very uncommon thing had happened at last, and when Paxton was caught it all came out—how he had robbed Mrs. Howard, and, hiding in my grounds, had heard Lucy read her brother's letter aloud—how, as Colónel L'Estrange, under cover of my introduction, he had robbed the duchess—how, as he stood on the platform talking of the burglary, the duchess's diamonds and Lucy's were actually on his person! There was no doubt that Paxton had been superlatively clever, and in my admiration for his talents and my sorrow that they were put to such ill uses, I forgave his chuckling over his delight at having "gammoned that fool, Sir Francis."

My dear wife never sighs for extraordinary events now; we both think we have had enough of them. We are as happy as ever, for burglars cannot take away love and children, and good health and sweet temper. But we are happy minus the diamonds, for Paxton got them abroad before he was caught. I wanted to give Lucy some more, but she wouldn't let me.

"I couldn't bear the responsibility again," she said. "Give them, by-and-by, to Baby's wife."

As for the duke, he never wearies of chaffing me, and calling me Colónel L'Estrange's confederate.

AUTUMN FISHING ON THE SHANNON.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

AUTHOR OF "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "A CRACK COUNTY," ETC.

LATE in the season, after an almost total inaction during the summer months, salmon as a rule are given to rising again. True, in the autumn they are lean and black, have lost every vestige of that silvery brightness which adorns them when they first come up from the sea, and as an article of food are hardly fit for human consumption; nevertheless in many instances they afford excellent sport, and anglers pursue them as perseveringly as ever.

The fish in the Shannon run large, and a salmon weighing between thirty and forty pounds is by no means infrequently met with. According to the state of the weather and water, the number and humour of the river's finny inhabitants, so are the seasons good or bad. The year before last exceptionally fine sport was obtained at Killaloe, where one rod in four weeks killed fifty-four salmon, making an aggregate weight of seven hundred and fifty pounds, five of the fish being over thirty pounds. Of that year's sport the inhabitants will probably talk to their dying day. The like, it appears, was never seen before, and in all probability will never be seen again.

The present autumn season is as bad as the former one was good. Three big floods in March, May and June enabled the inmates of the various pools to pass up into Lough Derg, a large lake twenty miles in length, through which the Shannon flows. The fishermen at Killaloe complain of the iron water-gates placed just opposite the town, declaring that since their erection, sport has materially changed for the worse. The object of these gates is to maintain the lake at a uniform level, and so to prevent the flat upper valley of the Shannon from being flooded during periods of heavy rain. This has been attained at the expense of the fishing, for according to whether the gates are kept open or shut, does the water rise and fall. One day the river may be in perfect order, the next, you are disagreeably surprised to find that the artificial barrier has been shut overnight, and as a consequence the water has fallen some five or six inches, changing its aspect altogether. Then you must reconcile yourself to the tantalizing prospect of waiting for rain, since the gates will not be opened again until

that desirable event takes place. It will easily be seen what an important part they play in the fortunes of the angler ; for although no one yet has ever exactly ascertained the conditions necessary to induce fish to rise, it is tolerably certain that they will not do so when subjected to continual variations of the water.

Another cause generally assigned by the experts of Killaloe as the reason of the present indifferent sport, is the presence of a large body of labouring men, who are engaged on the work of widening the river's bed, about a quarter of a mile above the town and at a point a little below that, where it issues from the lake. These operations are also being carried on with a view to preventing the flooding of the low-lying country. A projecting strip of land which, jutting out into the river, caused it to take a considerable bend, is being removed by blasting and machinery. The superfluous earth is carried away in trucks, drawn by a small steam-engine, and deposited by the river's brink lower down, where it is rapidly forming a large and unsightly embankment. From early morn until late at night, this engine is kept busily plying, and it may well be that the constant air vibrations it produces as it puffs along the banks, communicate themselves to the water, and so to the wily fish, rendering them warier even than their wont. Whatever the cause, they will not take, and the angler's patience is tried this year to the utmost. In fact, he must be a true sportsman, and blessed with an inexhaustible stock of perseverance, else he will be very apt to pack up his things and retire from the scene in disgust. Neither has the weather been in his favour. The prevalence of cutting north winds, diversified by an occasional hailstorm, render an open boat a somewhat doubtful pleasure, requiring a hardy constitution. The Shannon is a noble, broad and—at Killaloe—swift-running river, which courses in merry rapids between tree-clad banks, gathering here and there in dark, deep pools, where foam-bubbles glide slowly along the surface like specks of snow, and oily eddies revolve with a glassy quietude. In the spring, large flies of gaudy pattern are patronized, but late in the season very small, number eight, double hooks are used. The favourite colours are black, green, blue and claret bodies, with partridge, jay or gallina hackles, a mixed wing of mallard, dyed swan, teal, turkey, Indian crow and golden pheasant, finished off by a neat ostrich herl head.

But alas ! often the most artistic fly ever tied fails to lure the sulky salmon from his haunts. Then the prawn is called into requisition. These can always be obtained bottled in glycerine, though it is generally necessary to write to Dublin or London to secure them. They frequently prove efficacious when fly, minnow, spoonbait—all have produced no results. The usual method, after inserting the hooks, is to tie each prawn tightly on with red thread, for the fish are given to nibbling at them and sucking them off, if not firmly secured. They are worked in two ways.

One is by casting, great care being taken to keep the bait gently moving just above the bottom, a process which requires much skill and practice; the other and easier method consists of letting the prawn dangle in the current. The boats used are flat-bottomed, four planks in breadth, long, and pointed at both ends. The man at the stern wields a broad-bladed paddle, whilst he at the bow either plies an oar, or else keeps the boat stationary by means of a long pole. The boatmen are very expert, and shoot the rapids with great precision and dexterity. Having taken up a desirable position, the trolling rod is put out, and a liberal length of line granted. The end of the rod rests on a seat, and a large stone is placed on the line immediately above the reel, to act as a check, and strike the fish when he comes, without human intervention. A long period of inaction succeeds, during which the men yawn, though their keen eyes continue to watch the water's surface, and the despondent angler flogs carelessly, if not aimlessly. Suddenly, when things could not possibly look worse than they do, the point of the trolling rod jerks downwards until it well nigh describes a semi-circle, and buries itself in the current. A breathless moment ensues. No one stirs hand or foot until the fish has really struck himself. Then the stone is seen to move, and rolls from the line, and the reel is set in motion. An exclamation of delight escapes from the fishermen.

Hurrah! hurrah! He is hooked. The black old patriarch of the pool has succumbed to the attractions of the succulent prawn. The line stiffens, and he makes a fierce run down stream, but turns immediately he finds himself checked, and heads steadily up the river, gallantly striving to reach the strong-running water above the point where his ill-timed voracity got him into trouble. "Go ann, Pat, go ann. Don't take it so aisy," shouts Micky at the stern, wielding his paddle with short, powerful strokes, to Patrick Maloney at the bow, who, honest fellow, is pulling with a right good will. "He's a salmon, and a big one too, bedad."

Their combined efforts anticipate the rush of the captive. The line begins to slacken, and with all speed the angler reels up, his face flushing with pleasure and exertion. The dead weight upon his arms proclaims a prize of no ordinary size. He is hard on the furious fish, and turns him in the midst of his wild career. Never again will he swim among those splashing rapids, whose cool depths he loves so well. Struggling desperately, he takes a last farewell of them. But the combat is exhausting. That defeated rush up stream has half drowned him. He pauses a second to take breath, maintaining a sullen pull upon the line; then dives deep to the stony bottom, where, by a series of powerful and spasmodic jerks, that threaten every minute to set him free, he seeks to dislodge the hateful hook. In vain. To his mortal agony, and to the supreme satisfaction of the angler, it holds firm. Again and again he makes frantic endeavours to escape. He struggles most

gallantly ; it is a splendid fight ; but every fresh effort only serves to reduce his strength. At length he rises to the surface, and turns slowly over on his side. Then, for the first time, are his huge proportions clearly revealed as he floats upon the stream.

"Begorrah, Pat," cries Micky, his grey Irish eyes shining with enthusiasm, "but he weighs foive-and-thirty pounds if he weighs an ounce. Stiddy, now, stiddy, don't be for goin' at sich a rate."

"Aye, but we've just done for him foine," sings out the elated Pat, leaning forwards, and disentangling the gaff from the poles, rods and net that encumber it. "My belief is that he's quite sivin-and-thirty pounds. Any way, he's a powerful hivvy fish."

With this remark the angler agrees. His arms are aching, his muscles strained and tense. At this juncture, he reels up fast, trusting to his stout Marana gut and pliant Castle Connell rod to bear the weight imposed upon them. Slowly but surely he endeavours to tow the monster in towards the boat. Pat, standing keen and erect, watches his opportunity to plunge the gaff through the captive's long, black back. Stretching far over the gunwale, he seeks with a swift movement to secure the prize. Agonizing moment ! He has missed him. With a mighty splash and a huge angry flap of the tail, the salmon, with all his remaining strength, and goaded by the energy of despair, makes another rush. The contest is prolonged for full five minutes more, but the end, though deferred, comes before long. With gasping gills and open mouth, he once again turns over on his side. He has no strength left ; and this time the cruel gaff penetrates deep into his flesh, causing the red blood to spurt forth in a scarlet stream. He is hauled into the boat, and Pat promptly proceeds to inflict a series of merciless blows on his head with a large stone. His death agonies are brief. Soon the convulsive movements of his wet, shining body cease, and it becomes still and motionless. Then the hook is cut out of his jaw, for small as it is, it has taken firm hold, and the boat is triumphantly moored to the bank, so that its occupants may recover from their recent labours. The angler stretches his quivering arms, and looks complacently at the captured prey. He takes out his weighing machine, and fixes the hook in the gristly part of the salmon's mouth. It takes the combined efforts of both boatmen to lift him from the ground. Thirty-six pounds and a quarter he weighs, fair and square, and without adding on any extra few ounces, according to a common enough fashion. Pat and Micky leap out on to the shore, and there light their pipes, puffing with manifest enjoyment at the strong tobacco which fills them. And the monster fish lies straight and rigid at the bottom of the boat, dyeing the clean planks red with his gore. Ugly indeed he is to look at. Not a vestige is left of his shining spring beauty. His lower jaw wears a spur, at least an inch in length, his body is lean and black from a prolonged residence in fresh water ; his plumpness and roundness are gone. But although

indifferent eating, he will make a very excellent kipper, and his capture is attended with quite as much pride as if he were still arrayed in silvery sheen.

And now, the shortening October day begins to close in. The mill pool grows dark and still, reflecting the colour of the grey clouds overhead. The tops of the rounded trees growing on the river's right bank, gradually lose their sharpness of outline, and seem to melt into the purple evening sky. Twilight creeps gently and mysteriously over the whitewashed buildings of the mill, and wraps in misty vapours, the square tower of the old, ivy-clad cathedral in their rear.

Looking up stream, the many-arched bridge that spans the river at Killaloe loses itself in the growing darkness of night, whilst colder and blacker become the wooded hills which border Lough Derg. One by one the stars shine out, and the crescent moon rides high in the heavens. It is time to go in—time to go back to the quiet lodgings, where the good station-master and his wife make you so comfortable. There, a warm fire, a capacious arm-chair and the English newspapers await you, followed in due course by a plain but excellent dinner. Never did cooking appear so good, for after several hours spent in the sharp bracing air, your appetite is keen, and you are too hungry and too happy to be fastidious.

At an early hour you retire to rest, to dream of gigantic salmon leaping greedily after cunningly constructed flies, and devouring sweet, juicy prawns that taste of glycerine. And ever in your ears rings the Irish beggar's benediction after the receipt of a silver coin, "Good luck to yer, yer honour, and a stiff loine. Shure, an' it will be getting a power of fish yer will to-day." All through the night you dream happy dreams of that same stiff line for which you have waited so long and so patiently, and which, when it comes, brings such intense satisfaction.

Hurrah, then, for the stiff lines! Many may they be in the forthcoming season of 1890. May they atone for past disappointments, and encourage in all British breasts, that love of sport which makes true men and brave of our sons, and teaches our daughters to prefer wholesome, healthy pursuits to the spurious excitements, and false frivolities of fashion. If it is cruel to kill fish, and hunt foxes, it is crueller still to bring a girl up to sell herself to the highest bidder, and live a restless, discontented life, full of strife and weariness. Give her an interest in something other beyond young men and frocks, and depend upon it the man who marries her will find she is not much the worse for being able to ride to hounds, and throw a fair fly. And as for the sterner sex, sport is the very source and fountain of all their finer qualities. It is the mother of that manly, self-reliant spirit which renders our countrymen a hardy and superior race. England will be but a sorry country when there is no more hunting, no more fishing, no

more shooting. But, please God, that day is yet far distant, and although the Killaloe salmon appear this season to have gone in for Home Rule, by the time the gorse shakes out its golden blossoms, and the hawthorn trees are white as snow, then may the Shannon once more sustain its name and fame as one of the finest sporting rivers in Ireland.

"SHEBA."

A STUDY OF GIRLHOOD.

By "RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "DAME DURDEN," "DARBY AND JOAN," "THE LADY NANCY,"
"GRETCHEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SHRINE OF "HE."

A WEEK later Paul Meredith sailed for England, taking the child with him. As long as he was with her or near her, Sheba kept her grief and suffering out of sight. She would not let him see what the mere thought of that parting was to her. Sometimes when he looked at the quiet face, or watched the busy fingers preparing little Paul's outfit, Meredith said to himself that she could not feel it so much after all. He did all he could to cheer her.

"I am going by steamer," he said. "That will only take six weeks. I will remain three at the most, then six weeks back—fifteen in all. Not so very long, my darling. Why, you will hardly have begun to miss me, ere I am back again."

She smiled a little sadly—she did not meet his eyes. "As if every day, every hour, I shall not need you and miss you," cried her heart, but the brave lips were mute. "It is my punishment," she told herself, "my punishment. For one whole year I have been blind and happy and forgetful. . . . As if it could last!—as if happiness were ever *meant* to last here, in this world of misery and regret! Oh, the wonder and the mystery of human life and human suffering! How one vainly seeks to solve it! Is it that the perishable is necessary to the eternal? Almost one might think so."

But the week came to an end. She could cheat herself no longer with a hope that something—some charm—some miracle might intervene and give her back her lover.

"Even now I will stay if you wish it," he whispered in that last hour, when they stood beneath the solemn stars and looked with despairing tenderness into each other's face. "Even now. It is so hard—so hard. I never thought it would be like this."

"It is—hard," she said, in a strange, stifled voice; "harder than I thought. Oh, Paul, Paul!" A sob broke from her then, that all her strength could not restrain. She clung to him in

sudden terrified abandonment. "If you should never return," she cried. "If you should change or regret——"

"Do you take me for a villain—a brute?" he cried fiercely. "Is not your honour dear as my own? Have I not sworn that while life lasts there shall be no other woman—no other love for me but you?"

The burning colour stained her white uplifted face. "Dear—I know: but men have sworn those oaths before and—broken them. And in that life to which you go, everything will be different. You may learn to regret—to despise."

"Oh, Sheba," he cried brokenly, "do not speak like this. Is it not hard enough to leave you, but must I leave you distrustful?"

"It is the pain," she cried, in the same stifled way. "I meant to be brave. I would not distress you, Paul, but when you go it is as if all my life were broken off, as a flower is broken from the stem that supports it. You have all the world before you, but I—I have nothing."

"Are your gifts of mind nothing?" he said. "You, too, may have a world if you will. The gifts that mine brings are only of accident, but yours are your own, and each year will but beautify and enrich their store."

Her head dropped on his breast. "Your love is more than all," she said; "if I lost that——"

"You never shall," he answered passionately. "Never, as I live. Tell me you believe it, or I cannot leave you in peace. What have I done that you should doubt me in such an hour as this?"

"I will not doubt you, Paul," she said, lifting her white face once more; "never till your own lips bid me do so. But now go; go while I am strong enough to bid you. Between us, all has been said, save just—Good-bye."

"Oh, my own, my own! . . . may Heaven guard and bless you till we meet again."

Her lips met his; her eyes looked back to his—brave, loving, trustful, as always they had looked in that glad golden year. Between them—all had been said.

* * * * *

How those first cold empty days passed, Sheba could never remember. Desolate beyond all desolation was her life to her then, for that life had only lived in the love and tenderness of another since the hour of passionate abandonment that had sealed her doom.

Müller watched her unceasingly and with a great dread at his heart. He thought she would be ill if she could not be roused. She never ate, or slept, or did anything save sit in her little lonely room in a stupor of grief that found no relief in tears or complaints, or in any natural outlet such as most women find so readily.

He watched her, he followed her about like some old shaggy

faithful hound, but she neither heeded nor spoke to him ; she had, indeed, no thought of any one, save of the man who was already beyond her sight and touch, and no consciousness of anything save the dread, strong, terrible misery that had crushed out all the joy and all the hope of her heart.

She was mad, if love be madness, and at times he longed to tell her so ; but the sight of her suffering restrained him, and life had taught him patience, though never had he needed it so sorely as now.

But gradually she recovered. The fortitude and strength of her nature asserted themselves, and day by day some dormant energy awoke, and she gathered up endurance and courage, and began to look out on the sunlight and beauty with seeing eyes once more, and to speak less sadly, and to think of the needs of daily life and of the old familiar household cares, and to tell herself, "I must live and hope, because *he* lives."

By-and-bye there came a time when life knew a need more imperative, and an obligation more compulsory than her love for her lover. She had to rouse herself and think and act. It was two months since Paul had left—time for some news of him to reach her, and every day she rose with the hope of that expected letter strong in her heart.

It did not reach her, for the very good reason that it lay at the bottom of the sea, Paul having trusted it to a vessel which they spoke on the way, because he thought she would get it sooner. The vessel was wrecked in a frightful storm which overtook it some days before sighting Melbourne. A few of the crew were picked up afterwards, but the letters and stores were lost for ever.

Every day she would look at Müller with that mute inquiry in her eyes, but mails came in and vessels of every description arrived daily in the port, and still there was no letter. She tried to work, but there was no heart in what she did, and when she submitted the papers to the old German, he saw that their composition was merely mechanical labour, without the impulse and inspiration and freshness that had lent her first book so great a charm.

He grew restless and impatient as the waning summer days wore on.

"To think that a man's love should slay all *that* !" he thought, as he looked from her book to herself, and saw that she vainly tried to rouse herself, or to throw the old zeal and energy and delight into the pages she transcribed.

Sometimes in the lonely moonlight nights she would walk to and fro under the garden trees ; otherwise she never went out, or stirred beyond the precincts of the little house.

One night he joined her there. He had kept silence ; he had been patient so long : at last he spoke.

"If you go on like this you will be ill," he said. "Do you

forget what lies before you? You will need all your courage and all your strength."

"I am well enough," she said coldly.

"No," he said "you are not; you are thin and weak; you eat nothing; all your colour is gone; at night I hear you pacing your room—you take scarcely any rest. And all for what? Ah, *mein Fräulein*, have reason; be sensible, as your old Müller is. Let me say to you the old philosophy: 'Fate is strong—it is useless to rebel.' Your letter will come no quicker because you watch the road, or read of the mails that are due; your lover will not arrive one day sooner for all that you fret and wear yourself ill with longing and suspense. If he is coming back, he will come back. Can you not be consoled and patient? As for the letter—the little bit of paper—bah! Let us think calmly for one moment of the dangers to which that little bit of paper is subject. Hundreds and thousands of letters are written that never reach their destination. True, you may say, 'Why should just *mine* be singled out?' I only say again, as I have said so many times before—the 'Irony of Fate.' The more you look on life, and its accidents and results, the more you are convinced that a peculiarly malignant, spiteful little demon sits like a spider in his web, catching up all the flies of incident and opportunity. Out of a hundred letters, yours is just *the* letter that could comfort, restore, and delight one anxious, faithful heart. 'I must have that letter,' says the demon. 'Let the other ninety-nine go; but I must catch that one.' So he catches it. How, I know not. It slips down a crack of a letter-box; it is dropped on the way to the office, and some one steals the stamp; it is in a mail-bag that falls overboard; it is in a steamer that is wrecked, and one never more hears of. So it is . . . for why? Because out of all kinds and numbers of letters, it is just *the* one that is most anxiously desired. Mrs. John Snooks writes to Mrs. James Robinson, and Mrs. James Robinson gets the letter. Why? Because she cares nothing for Mrs. John Snooks, and only thinks, 'Bother the woman! I shall have to answer her.' You see? Now be a brave, hopeful *Fräulein* as of old. If it is to come, it will come. Say to yourself that; then the colour will come back to your face, and the desire to eat, and to sleep—all will be well. It was but to set the mind at rest, and there is only one thing to do that—philosophy."

Sheba smiled somewhat mournfully at this tirade.

"No doubt," she said, "you are right. But it is easier to preach philosophy than to exercise it."

"Try," he said, "only try. With the very effort there comes satisfaction that increases and redoubles. Soon one can look out on life cool and dispassionate—taking its joys thankfully, its sorrows resignedly. Believe me that is better—oh! how much better, I cannot express—than your wild ecstasies and excitements."

"Oh!" she cried passionately, "do you think I would not be calm if I *could*? Do you think I don't try? But it is too hard for me. He might have written—he ought to have written, and every day that brings another disappointment makes me feel more desperate."

"Hush, hush!" he said soothingly. "You must not speak like that. All human life is more or less associated with pain, bodily or mental; and have I not told you that 'that from which there is no physical or spiritual escape, must be endured as patiently as nature permits?'"

"Nature is cruel," she said wearily, "and so is life, and all the laws that govern it."

"Perhaps," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "At least we think so, because the human organization is averse to suffering in any shape or form. But we cannot escape. Never was man or woman born into this world who had not a share. That is one positive way, at all events, in which the 'Unknowable' has manifested himself since the entrance of sin into the plan of Creation. Now, looking on life, we find that evil is the predominating force. For every joy—a double allowance of sorrow; for every granted blessing—a million disadvantages. To illustrate it, *mein Fräulein*, here is a lovely country, cursed by heat and—mosquitoes——"

"Especially mosquitoes," said Sheba with a faint smile. "But perhaps nature has provided them as an excuse for smokers, like yourself."

"That is unkind," he said; "though with your gracious permission I go to light my pipe and protect myself from the enemies. There are too many insects in the world, *mein Fräulein*; that is so. Some day I will write a history on them—'The History of Superfluous Insects.' . . . I must put down that title."

"I wonder," said Sheba, "how many titles you have put down, and when the histories they have suggested, will be written."

"Paul said that once," he answered. "I told him life might be long enough even for me to write my histories. First, I await a chance that there will be a race likely to read them. One great mistake is the life that lives in an age that cannot comprehend it."

"I think," said Sheba wearily, "life is all a mistake. It seems to have no why, or wherefore."

"Oh," he said coolly, "it has its uses as well as its martyrs. Others worked for us, and we work for others; others suffered, and we reap the reward. But youth will always make the mistake of expecting too much, of imagining it is of pre-eminent individual importance; that its desires, its dreams, its loves, its hopes are all to be considered and realized . . . and we are to the great mass of humanity only as the little spot in the map that marks one place among a million; the piece in the child's puzzle that helps to make the whole intelligible; not till we learn that truth

can we master the secret of philosophy—content and patience. So suffering has its uses, you see, hard as it seems to believe it."

She moved along beside him under the heavy eucalyptus boughs. Her hands were loosely clasped before her; her eyes, that used to seek the stars, now only sought the ground.

She sighed wearily. "Dear Müller," she said, "I realize the truth of your words, but they do not comfort me. Everything is so different—now."

"Ah!" he said impatiently; "why will you women love? You spoil your lives always, and only for a dream."

"I suppose," she said, "we cannot help it." Then she hesitated; the shy, soft colour came and went in her clear pale skin. "Dear friend," she said brokenly, "you have been so good, so kind, and never one word of rebuke or reproach—and I am sure—I am sure you blame me. You think I have done very wrong. . . ."

"Child," he said gently, "do not ever speak like that to me. I am not a God; I blame no one. As for right or wrong—those fundamental principles of morality—they are words inflated by the breath of every social distinction. If we are to believe 'whatever is, is right,' there can be no question of wrong at all. If wrong exists, or is caused to exist, then whatever is, is *not* right. Right is a condition of things appealing to certain minds; but what is right to one mind may be totally wrong to another. The savage does not think it right that his territories should be wrested from him, and his freedom destroyed; but the white man does, and takes them. The labourer does not think it right that he should toil early and late, and subsist on coarse fare, while his employer lives a life of luxury and idleness on the fruit of his toil and scanty wage. Morality deems it right that our sentiments, emotions, and inclinations should be gratified within reasonable degrees; but no two temperaments would define a *reasonable* degree in exactly the same way. Who is to decide which is the *right* way? If it is a question of the one that combines the greatest satisfaction to oneself, with the infliction of the least harm to others, we would want a Committee of Inspection for each case! It is quite impossible to decide how far our deeds control or affect the lives of others. An action is like the dropping of a pebble in a pool. Who can count the circles that spring from that one fact? Self-denial and self-sacrifice are beautiful virtues, but they may do an immense amount of harm physically and morally; for experience shows that they are invariably exercised for the benefit of very unworthy objects, who stand in some personal relation to the exerciser. So you see, *mein Fräulein*, your actions concern yourself, and you best know how they came about, and it is you—not I—who have to suffer for them. Why, then, should I blame you? As for the right or the wrong of the case, far be it from me to express myself. A pure, unselfish love is rare in this world. When a woman loves she thinks there is only one god in the earth, and

she calls it—'He.' When she finds that passion is selfish and exacting, she sacrifices herself at the shrine of 'He.' If that passion grows chill, or indifferent, she finds the fault in herself—'He' is still perfect, still adorable. Ah, well, I am a foolish old man. I can talk, talk, talk. It will never alter woman. One wonders sometimes how that God they worship, made them so foolish, and so wise, and so lovable, all in one."

He drew her arm within his own, with a sudden gesture of tenderness. "Do not think badly of your old Müller," he said. "He has never blamed you; he is your friend for always. But oh, my dear! my dear! don't pin all the faith and trust of your great heart on a man's love. . . . Did I not tell you that all women's idols have feet of clay?"

"Not Paul's," she said very low, and with a great beauty and tenderness in her uplifted eyes.

"Oh, no," said the old German grimly, "not Paul's. Certainly not—Paul's. His are pure gold."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

THE air had grown close and sultry while they paced the dusky garden walks. The faint breeze died away, and that ominous stillness which forbodes a storm oppressed the atmosphere.

"*Ach!*" said Müller, lifting his straw hat, "but this would be a delightful land if it had two months less of summer."

"I am tired; I think I will go in," said Sheba wearily, as they neared the verandah.

"Well, I will make myself some exercise," said Müller. "I cannot sleep when a storm is threatening. I go towards the river," he added, as she withdrew her arm. "Now be good, be wise, *mein Fräulein*; sit down and read one of our good old friends, and try to be philosophical. Do not write—your brain wants rest. Then, too, your heart will grow calm."

She said nothing; only went quietly into the low trellised verandah. A lamp was burning on the table, the bamboo chairs were scattered about in their usual careless fashion, some littered with books and papers and music—the music at which Müller worked so perseveringly.

"For fame," he said, "since that an audience had yet to be born who would understand anything deeper than 'Trovatore' or 'Tom Bowling.'"

She seated herself beside the table, and took up one of the English periodicals that had come in by the last mail.

Turning over the pages, she came upon a review of her own book, "Damaris." With a little thrill of pardonable pride she

read the frank praise, the kindly hints, and the welcome encouragement it gave her. Was her childish prayer to be granted, she wondered? The prayer that had asked for neither beauty, nor love, nor wealth, but only for that one Divine gift which makes all other things of life of little value, because in itself it holds all.

It had seemed so easy to her to write : her imagination was so vivid, her fancies so quick, that strange education of hers had so enlarged her mind and ripened its forces of thought and expression, that the effort to curb and curtail had cost her far more than the effort to construct her story.

And every one spoke well of it, and none of those critics and reviewers had discovered the secret of the author's sex. The book was always attributed to a man—young and inexperienced, but still a man. She smiled a little as she laid down the notice. "I suppose," she said, "I owe that severe style to Müller. How he did prune and curtail and ridicule what he called my 'flowers of expression.' I owe him a great deal."

She heard the click of the garden gate as she pushed the magazine aside, and took up a book in its place. She supposed it was Müller returning, and did not look up. The lamplight fell on her bent head with its lovely wealth of hair, and on the graceful outlines of her figure, as she leant forward, supporting her cheek on her hand.

Suddenly, without warning or ceremony, a voice broke the stillness—the voice of a woman, and a stranger.

"I suppose," it said, "you—are Sheba Ormatroyd?"

The girl started, her hand dropped. She looked back into a strange and unknown face, with blue mocking eyes, and bright hair, that made a warm red halo round the white brows.

"You are very unceremonious," she said, "but as you seem to know my name, perhaps you will state your business."

"My business!" said the woman with a coarse laugh. "Well, first it's to see you. Second to tell you a piece of news that's too good to keep. I've had some trouble to find you out. Girls of your stamp aren't generally so close; maybe you're one of the mock virtuous lot! However——"

Sheba rose to her feet. Some premonition of the truth flashed across her. Her face grew white as death, but her eyes, sombre and defiant, flashed back to that insulting gaze.

"Who are you, and why do you come here?" she said haughtily. "I have no wish to hear your news. You are a total stranger; you can know nothing that concerns me."

"I know a great deal," said the woman insolently; "more, perhaps, than you think. I know first that you are my husband's mistress, and have been trying to take him from me. Yes, you may start. I am Paul Meredith's wife—and *the law has given him back to me*. That's my news. How do you like it? I thought

I'd bring it myself. Best to show there was no animosity. You thought to get him, did you! Well, I don't admire his taste, but that's neither here, nor there——"

A faint cry of horror left the girl's pale lips. Words she could find none; the veins in her throat seemed to swell; everything grew dim and dark before her eyes. "*His wife!*" she cried in her heart . . . "Oh, God of Heaven—his wife!"

"You see," continued the woman leisurely, "I knew the case would go against him if I secured the cleverest man. Bless you, I've come out as innocent as a lamb, and he—as black as Satan—if he is black. Myself I think there's a deal more wickedness in the white side of humanity. . . . Well, you see, Paul wasn't in court, and I was. Then the lawyer . . . he was quite in love with me, and so was the judge—a merry old soul with a shrewish wife. He wasn't above a spree on the sly, for all his wigs and gowns. You see women are scarce here as yet, and when a pretty one does crop up—whew—w!—she can just twiddle the men round her fingers! That's why I stayed in Melbourne and did the wronged and deserted wife. And, you see, *you* were a great card to play!—the trump of trumps I may say. And now you know how it stands. I've come here to tell you that I mean to have my husband back . . . and that you can walk . . . just as soon as ever you like. He's gone to England, and I'm going to follow him. He may soon be an earl, and I intend to be a countess, whether he likes it or not. There's the child, too. He's the lawful heir, and I'm going to stick to him. Now do you see how the land lies? You have had your innings. You had best go and find another lover. It won't take you long in Melbourne, and the price is just what you like to fix. . . . My!—if the girl isn't going to faint . . . By Jove, I thought she'd take it easier than that."

Sheba had sunk back on the bamboo lounge, sick to death with shame and horror. Her senses reeled—she could neither see nor hear, but the echo of those coarse, brutal words, seemed to beat on her brain like a brazen hammer.

The woman moved forward—she saw that the girl had lost consciousness, and in common humanity went to her relief. She loosened her gown and laid her back on the seat. Suddenly her eyes flashed. She uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I wouldn't have said it if I had known—that!" she muttered. "Poor thing! she looks but a child . . . So this is what all that pretence of living away from the house came to . . . And Paul who always set up for a saint . . . My! . . . just as if they ain't all alike: saint and sinner—judge and jury. I've had some experience, and I ought to know!"

She was bathing Sheba's brow with cold water, and fanning her with one of Müller's MS. sheets of music while these thoughts occupied her mind. But the girl did not revive, and after a time

she grew alarmed. She raised her voice and called for help, but no one appeared. Again she cried, and yet again.

Suddenly the gate opened—there was a sound of rapid steps. "*Donnerwetter!* What's the matter . . . Woman, who are you, and what have you done to the *Fräulein*?"

"Never mind who I am just now," said the woman insolently. "I only came to see her on a matter of business, and just as I was leaving she was took like this. I don't know if you're a married man, but if you'll take my advice, just carry her to her bed. You look strong enough, though she's no fairy, and then I'll look after her while you go for a doctor . . . And you'd best look sharp, too. Haven't you any female about the place?—'cause I should like some one handy."

Müller had listened dumb and stupefied to these directions, but one look at the girl's death-like face decided him to act first, and talk afterwards. Perhaps the woman was a dressmaker, or a nurse. He did not parley further, but lifting Sheba in his arms, bore her to her own room, and then went off for the nearest doctor.

Meanwhile Sheba's self-appointed attendant undressed her with deft and strangely gentle fingers, and again tried all possible means to restore her to consciousness.

Once the girl sighed heavily and opened her eyes, then with a little hysterical cry lapsed once more into insensibility.

The woman grew seriously uneasy at last. "Good Lord! supposing she dies!" she muttered. "Nothing seems to rouse her. I never thought she was in this state, or I wouldn't have done it, not even for the sweetness of revenge. To think how I've counted on this hour, and thought what glorious fun it would be to tell her how I'd won the fight, and now——"

If Müller had heard her he would have said she, too, was only illustrating his favourite theory of the Irony of Fate.

* * * * *

It was an hour and a half before Müller returned, bringing the doctor with him. The stranger and the servant were both with Sheba. She was still unconscious.

The grief and anxiety of those two months, coupled with the shock of that terrible announcement, had proved too much for her strength. The doctor looked grave when he saw her condition, and as hour after hour passed she grew worse. The servant, a young inexperienced girl, was worse than useless, and he speedily ordered her out of the room. Finding that the other woman was handy, and free from all nervousness, he begged her to remain through the night. He imagined she was a friend of the unfortunate girl, whose state grew momentarily more critical, and he had no time to waste on useless questions.

Müller paced the verandah the whole night long, in a frame of mind that defied philosophy. He was telling himself that from first to last it was he who had played the *Deus ex machinâ* of

Sheba Ormatroyd's fate. He had inserted that advertisement which brought her to their house—he had engaged her—he had talked of her to Paul until the young man's interest was awakened too deeply for his own peace of mind. He had counselled him to run away with her, and again, when that fatal barrier had arisen between them, he it was who had persuaded the girl to remain still under their roof, though he might well have known the danger of such a proceeding.

"I only meant to educate her mind," he told himself again and again in self-extenuation. "I meant her to be such a woman as the world has rarely seen; and look what I have made of her. While I was dreaming of her future, love was undermining all my work. . . . Some day I will write a history of Sublime Follies—as illustrated by woman—and show how she spoils all her genius, talent, and fame, by some weakness such as Sheba has displayed. They are all alike—ready to forget themselves and what they owe to their genius, and barter all for a man's sake. . . . But we are nearly as foolish. I, with all my philosophy, I was not wise enough to turn away from a girl's sad face and big pathetic eyes. I, who had sworn all my life to occupy myself but with my own fortunes, and when I am old and grey, and should have been hard and selfish too, I turn aside to meddle with the fate of another. I am rightly served. . . . There was never a female creature born who did not make a man repent the hour in which he turned aside to aid her. I am not the first. There is no fear that I shall be the last—if that is consolation."

But it was not consolation as he paced to and fro, and watched the lightning play over the dark sky, and heard the roll of the thunder through the sultry night, and the fall of the heavy rain among the leaves without. Not consolation when each report from that silent room had more of dread, and less of hope.

* * * * *

The rain had ceased. There was a faint glow of saffron and rose in the eastern sky. Müller paused to look at it, when a cry reached his ears, a cry of more than mortal agony.

Then a window was hurriedly opened. The doctor put out his head and called to him:

"We must have further advice," he said. "I can't take the responsibility. See here—go to this address; he is the best doctor in Melbourne. Tell him to come at once, and to bring his instruments. Stay—I had best write it down. Lose no time—every moment is of importance."

Müller took the card. He felt bewildered—almost afraid. "Is there—danger?" he asked faintly.

"Danger!" said the physician curtly, as he began to close the window. "Yes; two lives hang in the balance. One must be sacrificed before many hours are past."

CHAPTER XLIX.

"GOOD-BYE, PAUL!"

THROUGH fever-mists of pain and semi-madness, the brain of Sheba Ormatroyd struggled back to consciousness.

She opened her eyes on the dim light of her own little chamber. It was strangely still; she seemed quite alone. The white net curtains were drawn back from the low iron bedstead, the furniture was in its accustomed place; yet it seemed as if long, long years had passed since she had seen them.

She half rose from the pillows. How weak she felt. Had she been ill? She pushed the heavy hair from off her brow and tried to think what had happened. She had been talking to Müller—ah, yes—then she was reading—then . . .

She sank back with a faint cry. She remembered it all now—all.

That woman, that bold, hard-faced woman who had told her she was Paul's wife—that the law had given him back to her. Never again could he be hers, to love, to care for. The law had said so—the hard, cruel law of man, which had decreed he was bound to an adulteress, a harlot—almost a murderess!

She cowered there among the pillows, and covered her eyes with her hands. Memory spoke of anguish suffered. The silence around was full of ghostly noises rising higher and higher in a scale of terror that wrung her very soul. Outside, the trees whispered, the soft stir of wings spoke of flitting shapes, and the flutter of life among the thick-leaved creepers and drooping boughs beyond her silent chamber.

As she heard, other memories came thronging thick and fast. A time of more than mortal agony—of strange faces bent above her—of strange voices whispering around her. . . .

"It is dead—of course—better the child than the mother . . ."

The child—her child; it was dead, then. . . In her heart she was thankful that no look or voice of her unknown offspring could ever remind her of its father. Better the child than the mother! Oh, no! no! What fool had said that? What was life to her now! What could it ever be again? She felt only the terrible, inexorable humiliation of one truth. That other woman was Paul's wife—the adulteress who had wronged him—not she—never, never she—the girl who had loved him better than her own life, ay, loved him to her own undoing! As she thought of it, reason and hope alike deserted her. She looked out on one wide, blank desolation, and her soul cried out, "It is too hard; I cannot bear it."

She lay there with closed eyes—a dull stupor held her senses. Suddenly a voice sounded; she started up, every nerve quivering with horror. That voice—that hateful, terrible voice. How came

she here? Why had she not followed Paul as she had threatened? The voice came nearer. She heard the familiar accents of the old German answering it.

"Indeed, my good lady, but for you I know not what we should have done. . . . The doctors say you saved her life."

Sheba hid her face on the pillow. What could they mean! Saved her life—this creature—this cruel fiend who had taunted her with her shame . . . had told her that Paul was hers, and that she was going to enforce her claims without an hour's delay.

She almost laughed in derisive scorn. Had Müller gone mad, or was her enemy acting a part in order to have the greater triumph? She lifted her head and listened again. Yes, it was true. This woman had stayed with her in those hours of peril; had nursed and tended her till danger was over. . . . *This woman!*

It seemed incredible. It seemed an outrage on all decency. It made her blood boil with shame and horror unutterable. And yet it was true—*true*. Then a very delirium of terror and of shame seized her strained and weakened fancy. Never again should this woman rest under the same roof with her—tend her, speak to her, minister to her wants and necessities. Never, whilst she had life to resist, strength to rebel.

The force of passion lent her strength that was almost super-human. Every nerve was strung to its utmost tension, every vein throbbled as with the torture of a newly-recognized outrage.

Ah, no! Let life go, as love had gone! Let the gates of existence close for ever on this fragment of another suffering mortal's history.

Stealthily, yet with the force of determination in her fevered movements, she crept out of bed—she thrust her naked feet into slippers, and, catching up a long dark cloak that hung behind the door, she threw it round her and drew the hood over her head. Then she opened the window softly and peered into the dark verandah beyond. No one was there, but the voices still reached her from the adjoining sitting-room.

The air was cool and fresh, the sky ablaze with stars. That coolness was delicious. Alas! it could not check the madness rushing swiftly as the blood itself through those fevered veins, mounting with wild hysterical force to the throbbing brain. Across the garden paths a dark shadow flitted, across the road beyond and down to the dark river, rapid and swollen now with heavy rains.

How swiftly the waters flowed—and out there beyond was the sea—the deep, dark, rolling sea—the sea that would bring her rest and sleep and peace—that would give Paul back his freedom—that would end her sorrows for ever . . .

She stood a moment on the bank, looking upwards to the shining silver worlds that filled the vaults of space. Suddenly a thought flashed through the pain and madness that held her in their grasp. . . . "If the end of this life be but the beginning

of another—if that other be cursed by memory of *this* ! Oh, God, if it be so, how fearful and useless an exchange. How more than cruel the destiny of the undying soul ! ”

She threw her wild despairing arms out to the silent night and the deep, swift waters. . . . “ Good-bye, Paul, good-bye,” she whispered. “ *You* at least will know why I could not live, once I knew the truth.”

A sudden gust of wind caught the loose folds of her cloak. As it blew away from her throat the strain attracted her notice with a sudden sense of restraint and impatience. Involuntarily she put up her hand and loosed the fastenings. The heavy cloth fell off her, and lay on the bank at her feet.

One moment she stood there, a white slender form with dusky rippling hair tossed back from the mute agony of her upraised face—one moment—then her arms fell to her side, and as a stone falls, she fell into the dark flowing water below.

(*To be concluded.*)

LONDON LETTERS,

TO VARIOUS COUNTRY COUSINS.

No. V.

DEAR COUSINS,

The time is approaching when we who live in town have very certainly the advantage of you who dwell in the country. When the first chill days of late autumn come upon you, you must inevitably experience a sensation of dreariness and, if you live far from neighbours, a feeling of isolation. With the expectation of the long winter before you, this feeling must be heightened by the anticipation of many such days to come, when the weather gets darker and colder, and callers become more and more infrequent.

In town, on the contrary, there is a delightfully cosy sensation in settling down for the winter. How cheery is the first fire, lighted on a chilly evening in October, and how pleasant is the task of making the house thoroughly comfortable with winter hangings and packing off to be thoroughly cleansed and renovated the lace and muslin curtains that looked so fresh and pretty in the hot weather, but have now acquired a faded and tawdry aspect, partly owing to their unsuitability to their autumnal surroundings. Town is at its best in autumn, so far as amusements are concerned. It is not too hot to enjoy the theatres and concert-rooms, and though an occasional fog is sure to occur on the most inconvenient days, things on the whole are quite enjoyable. Theatrical managers generally put forth enticing programmes for the autumn season; concerts are endless in their number and variety, and of late, October and November have been socially brilliant, many fashionable families preferring a sojourn in town to remaining in the country during the dispiriting season of decay.

Yes! we have the best of it, country cousins, though when the bright spring days come we shall be envying you, and longing for blue skies and green fields.

I hear that fashions in dress are to be very pretty and becoming this autumn. The very softest and warmest of woollen fabrics are in preparation for our wear. The texture is of the supplest, and the folds in which it is to fall are to be dictated by the figure they cover. During the days of crinolettes and dress-improvers you must often have noticed than when an actress on the stage appeared in

a gown with straight folds and guiltless of irrelevant excrescences, the sight of her was quite a refreshment to the eye. I have just seen a lovely gown prepared for a wedding that is shortly to take place in town. It is of velvet in the softest shade of reseda. The skirt is perfectly straight and plain all round, being gathered into a waistband. It is edged with a band of dark sable, about six inches deep. The bodice crosses over, as two-thirds of the new ones now do, showing a quantity of cream-coloured ruffles above the point where the two sides cross each other. The short coat, to be worn over this, is a purely delicious little garment. It is made of the reseda velvet, edged with sable and lined with blush-pink silk. The sleeves are rather wide at the wrist, so that they slip on without the slightest trouble. The coat fits tightly below the bust, fastening with large old silver buttons. Above this, it is double-breasted, turning back in revers lined with sable, the creamy ruffles of the bodice showing in the opening. A high sable collar fastens under the chin with an antique silver clasp. The hat to be worn with this is in the darkest brown felt, with brown and cream-coloured ostrich feathers, and a knot of blush-pink velvet. It must be a really hopeless woman who could look plain in such a becoming costume.

Tartans are worn, as they always are in autumn. Some have enormous checks, far too large for any one but a giantess to don without being dwarfed by them. The dressmakers, however, make them up on the cross, and use their highest skill to artistically arrange the portentous checks. These are by no means ugly when the lines are very soft and subdued. I have seen a dark moss-green checked with faint lines of amber and scarlet, which was really pretty. The texture of the good tartans is perfect; for some reason decidedly superior, as a rule, to that of the plain woollen materials. Beige is much in favour again, as a colour which combines pleasantly with the fashionable tones of brown and gold. I saw, yesterday, a very pretty costume of beige cloth, opening over a front of which the foundation was invisible, so closely was it covered with rows of broad gold military braid. The skirt was edged with a wide trimming of the braid, which also formed the sleeves from the elbow to the wrist; above were puffings of the beige cloth, gigot fashion. The collar, too, was like Malachi's in the warlike Irish melody, a "collar of gold."

It is possible that some of my country cousins may like to be told that "beige" means the natural brownish-yellow colour of the wool when undyed.

Gold is extraordinarily becoming to some complexions, usually to the brunette order, but by no means seldom to the richly tinted blonde, the "positive" not the "negative" blonde. If you are as well acquainted as you ought to be with your "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," you will remember his distinction between the two. I have seen golden hair look lovely with a gold fillet confining it, and a beautiful blonde made a great success last winter.

in an evening dress of brightest amber brocade. Try a mass of gold held up to your face before a looking-glass, cousins. You may make a useful discovery, and possibly a very economical one. To those who like to "gar auld claithes luik amaist as weel's the new," braid is an invaluable institution. It can be adapted to edges that are slightly worn, and used to cover pieces inserted down the front of a bodice to make it a little wider. Sometimes garments shrink; sometimes wearers expand. In either case a little clever adaption is necessary, and both braid and lace are often invaluable to hide the contrivances of the adaptor.

An excellent occupation for the autumn evenings is to braid oneself a dress trimming for wearing in the early spring days when bright sunshine makes a new gown a necessity. The best way to set about this is to get the dress planned and cut out, and then send the pieces to be braided to have the pattern stamped upon them. Braiding and embroidery always look doubly handsome when worked upon the material as they do when wrought in strips and laid on. A child's frock is pleasant work for wintry days, accompanied as it always is by thoughts of the little figure it is to invest. The amount of happiness that mothers get out of the needlework they do for their children can never be estimated. It is incalculable. And devoted aunts share in this inexpensive kind of enjoyment to a certain extent. But do not forget to allow for several months' growth on the part of the intended wearer, if you undertake to adorn a small garment for the wearing of some happy little niece or nephew.

When autumn begins we look on every fine day as a gift that is as unexpected as it is pleasant. It is like a bonus additional to our expectations and proportionately prized. To us in London a fine day often means a study of shop windows, which, just now, are full of attractive and tempting things. The new mantles are particularly pleasing and so varied of shape and style that only the most difficult will fail to find something to please her.

Some of us *are* hard to please, are we not? And not *always* because our standard is high, I fear. What do my country cousins think?

C. E. H.

LONDON SOCIETY.

NOVEMBER, 1889.

A NEW OTHELLO.

A NOVEL.

By IZA DUFFUS HARDY

AUTHOR OF "LOVE, HONOUR AND OBEDY," "NOT EASILY JEALOUS," "ONLY A LOVE STORY,"
"LOVE IN IDLENESS," ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE DIE IS CAST!"

"Ah! none so blest as I, and none so proud
In that wild moment, when a thrill was sent
Right through my soul, as if from thee it went
As flame from fire! But this was disallowed;
And I shall sooner wear a winter shroud
Than thou revoke my doom of banishment!"

THE prospects of the disabled steamer continued to improve slowly, but steadily. It proved to be only one of the smaller shafts of the machinery which had broken under the strain of the labouring engines, and it was under speedy process of repair. The heavy sea was subsiding, although very gradually; the wind veered to a more favourable quarter, so that the "Sicilian" was soon enabled to make way under sail with a fair following wind. They were nearing the Straits of Belle Isle, and the captain was in hopes that, unless delayed by the fogs which are frequent in that region, they would only be two or three days late at Quebec.

Ray Percival did not care much if they were a week late. Every day's delay was a day more with Asenath—and in one sense alone with her! cut off from their own world and from all other ties by trackless ocean, across which no sign could wing its way from the world they had left behind. He even blessed the illness which caused him to enjoy more of her society than under any other circumstances she would have vouchsafed to him. He was much

the worse for the exertion, excitement, and exposure to wet and cold that night; his shoulder was so painful he could hardly move his arm; and the doctor confided to Mrs. Fitzallan that there was some risk of its turning out a serious business if high fever and inflammation should set in.

Asenath was, as her husband had said, a born nurse. Whenever she was near accident or illness, the sick-room always seemed the natural place for her. The young doctor recognized her qualities, and treated it as a matter of course that she should give a helping hand in this case. Captain, doctor and stewardess alike regarded it as the natural thing that she should take a grateful interest in Mr. Percival's progress, and would have written her down as cold-blooded and selfish if she had failed to show some womanly attention to him. So Ray rather thanked than complained of the indisposition that drew her to his side, bringing solace and sunshine with her, though her visits seemed to him few and far between as angels', and, indeed, they were rarer and briefer than she would have paid to any one else under similar circumstances.

She talked to him cheerfully and practically, brought him reports of the progress of the vessel, and all the little current news of daily life on board. Not a word passed between them that all their fellow-passengers might not have heard. Dr. Fitzallan might have made an invisible third at all these interviews and found nothing to cavil at—nothing which Othello himself could have resented. Ray felt in the very air around Asenath that a rash word, or even an unguarded look, would startle her from his side as quickly as a wild bird takes wing, and she would be even less likely to return than the frightened bird.

So not a word was spoken of their personal feelings, of the past or of the future—least of all was there ever any most distant allusion to that consciousness which lay deep in both their hearts—the memory of the moment when he had held her in his arms and she had clung to him. Yet that memory was ever present—thrilling in his soul with a keen-edged joy that stung like pain! in hers, with tremulous dismay, hurt pride and shrinking shame. She shut her eyes from contemplating it; refused to acknowledge or face the thought; but it was *there*!

If only Ray had been well, she would have kept the whole length and breadth of the ship between them. But when the cause of his suffering was his having snatched her from a terrible death, she could hardly refuse to sit by his side occasionally and hand him lemonade or ice. And there were moments when she owned to herself that she did not absolutely *wish* to refuse—moments when in passing near the part of the vessel where the unfortunate lunatic was kept in strict confinement, under close guard, she heard his shouts and yells, and thought of her narrow escape—and Ray's. Thanks to his sound and healthy constitution, however, her sympathy was not called upon for any long

time. He soon turned the corner, quickly rallied, and made an earlier recovery than the doctor had thought possible.

As days passed on, and Ray was almost himself again, and the end of the voyage, although delayed, still steadily drew near, Asenath took into anxious consideration the troublous question that faced her—was Ray Percival's presence on board the "Sicilian" to be a secret, or not? Her natural instincts were all in favour of telling the truth; yet she could not but realize that there were some forcible reasons on the other side. It would be impossible to modify or tell only a part of the story; it must all be known or none. The fiction of sudden business calling him to Canada could delude neither his family nor her husband; it was too well known that he had started on that very Thursday ostensibly for Switzerland and Tyrol. The true story, if told, would probably create difficulties, coolness and estrangement between the two families, at present such good friends. All Ray's people would certainly make out amongst themselves the best case they could for *him*; and their view would most likely be that he was generously taking blame on himself to screen her! that she must have at least tacitly encouraged him and led him to believe that his company on the voyage would not be unwelcome.

And her husband? Here came the most important part of the question—what would he think and say? His displeasure was no light thing to risk. Would he believe in her perfect innocence all along of any suspicion of Ray's infatuation—of any fore-knowledge of his pursuit of her to Canada? And whether he fully believed her or not, was there not cause for vague but serious apprehensions in the relations between him and Ray when he should know? On the one side, just and lawful resentment; on the other, high spirit, fiery and reckless temper—was there no danger of some possibly disastrous collision here? She had learned to know Ray Percival's temper and disposition well enough by this time to realize that to bring him and her husband together in a position of hostility might prove to be like setting a lighted fuse to gunpowder.

She certainly had no need to trouble herself about Ray. He was all in the wrong; he merited no consideration from her; and at first she had bestowed none on him; she had thought only of herself and her own difficult position. But now she felt that although Ray did not deserve that she should take thought and heed for him, still she was *not* indifferent to his interests—his safety; and she shrank with vague dread from the idea of ill-blood between him and her husband. She had been more fiercely angry with Ray Percival than she had ever in her life been with any human being before. She had resented his conduct with a passion of wrath hitherto unknown to her; she had lashed him with bitterer words and crueller taunts than her calm lips had ever before uttered. But a reaction had set in from the hour when she

saw him locked in that terrible life-and-death struggle for her sake—when he fell at her feet fainting from loss of blood that was shed to save her! And the reaction shook her whole nature through and through, as the earthquake shakes the massive walls and upheaves the very foundations of the citadel which the enemy's batteries assail in vain.

Meanwhile, the engineers succeeded in putting the machinery in working order again, and the "Sicilian" made fair though not full speed, under sail and steam, through the Gulf of St. Lawrence. They had passed the Island of Anticosti; the great gulf was narrowing to the mouth of the great river; and they expected in the course of the evening to make Rimouski, where the mails and some passengers would be landed. And now Asenath knew the hour could be no longer postponed when she must have a decisive explanation with Ray, although she had never disliked any prospect so much as the idea of this re-opening of so sore a subject. Ray was up on deck again now, and except that he looked a little pale and worn, was quite restored to his old self. It was not difficult to manage a *tête-à-tête* with him, as he was only too eager to seize on any and every opportunity of being alone with her.

They were sitting on deck, looking at the land. They had been watching it slowly take shape and colour, till from a mere low bank of purple shadow along the horizon the landscape of green hills and woodland had grown clear—and a fair and welcome sight it was to the eyes of the ocean voyagers. Now by happy chance they found themselves apart and alone; they had got their chairs in a sheltered corner partly in the shadow of one of the boats, and none of their fellow-passengers were near.

Ray's eyes dwelt with a recognizing look on the blue hood under which her brown hair was coiled up and pushed away.

"The old blue hood!" he observed with a smile of tender retrospection. "How well I remember it! You have not worn it till now?"

"No; the red one has lost its colour with sea-water, so I took out my old blue one again," she replied.

"It looks like old times," he continued in the same reminiscent strain; "takes me back to that other voyage when I met you first."

"That was a less eventful voyage than this."

"It was indeed. But it was one that I shall never forget, all the same."

"I wish this voyage had been more like it," she rejoined. "I had nothing on my mind to trouble me then."

"I am sorry," he said, flushing, with one of his quick changes of colour, "I am very sorry if you are troubled now."

"I am. How could I be otherwise?" she replied gravely.

"And I am the cause, I suppose?"

She bent her head in acquiescence.

"I must speak to you now, unpleasant as it is to re-open the matter," she began. She paused a moment and then added slowly, even a little sadly, "I have no wish to reproach you again; I said my say."

"You did indeed," he interposed.

"But I cannot help a feeling of anger against you still when I think of the dilemma in which you have placed me," she continued.

"Then don't think of it. God knows you've made me suffer enough, because I felt I deserved your reproaches; but why must I be scourged any more?"

"Because we cannot avoid referring to the past in discussing the future," she answered firmly but gently; she had come to dealing very gently with Ray now. "This voyage is nearly over. Now, what is to be done? what account is to be given of your being here? Listen—look at the question on both sides. If it comes out that you, leaving your home ostensibly for Switzerland, came out on this vessel with me, ask yourself, who that hears it will believe that you followed me without any knowledge, without any overt encouragement of mine?"

"If they had only *heard* you, they would not doubt it," he rejoined with a bitter smile. "You treated me like some loathsome reptile!"

"But no one did hear," she said. "I have been thinking deeply, and I have come at last very reluctantly to the conclusion that—my husband"—she spoke slowly and with a steady effort, as if the words were sorely painful to utter—"had better not know. And if *he* does not know, *no one* must know."

"No one shall!"

"Then, on the other side, if no one is to know, I am driven into the position of having a secret from him. Perhaps you may find it hard to believe," she added with a faint touch of humility and appeal which was strangely new in *her*, "that I have never had a secret from him before!"

"I believe every syllable you say," he protested warmly.

"And yet you are forcing me into a position where I must deceive, tacitly, if not actively. I have not only a secret, but a secret shared with you."

"Which I would rather be torn in pieces than betray!"

"If chance—if some fellow-passenger should reveal it?" she suggested.

"I would outswear them!" he replied boldly.

"It is a pity you cannot do something better for me than that."

"I wish I could!"

"You can do one thing—but we will come to that afterwards. In regard to the first thing to be considered, it seems to me that in this choice of evils the lesser evil is to *conceal* your having been on board this vessel."

"Then so it shall be. It is what *I* should have wished myself, but I would of course submit my wishes entirely to yours."

"Well, then, how is it to be done? What are you to say? For *me*, I have merely to keep silence; your name is fortunately not on the passenger-list, as you only came on board at Moville; but *you*—how can you account for not having been in Switzerland?"

"I *will* have been in Switzerland!"

"Then there will be inquiries why you have not written from there. Oh!" she broke out quickly, with a flash of unconquerable revolt, "this is *hateful*! detestable! this plotting and weaving a web of falsehood. I do not see how I *can* bear it. I am half inclined to throw all to the winds and risk——"

"Risk nothing in the least unpleasant to yourself," he said eagerly. "Trust to me. My being here shall be as safe a secret as if it was buried in a tomb. No one has a right to question me. And for you, you have, as you say, only to keep silence—you need never speak one untrue word."

"The responsibility is none the less on my conscience if I shift the burden of the actual falsehood on to *yours*."

"I would take a heavier burden on my soul for *you*!" he protested. "But nothing of all this—no responsibility—can lie at *your* door when the whole fault has been mine from the beginning. And now, what is it I can do for you? You said just now there *was* something."

"Yes; one thing. We are due at Rimouski to-night. I have made inquiries, and find there is a homeward-bound steamer due there to-morrow. You must land to-night, take that steamer to-morrow, and return to England—to your home."

"Land to-night!" he repeated. "You cannot mean it! I must at least go on with you to Quebec and see you safe ashore."

"And miss a steamer, and lose a week or more, for one more day on board! No; what you must do is to land with the Harcourts and Smiths and the rest of the Rimouski party to-night, and sail for England to-morrow."

"I do not see that I *must*," he rejoined, with a rather sullen look darkening over his fair handsome face. "And what will they think of my only coming out to turn straight back from Rimouski, without reaching Quebec at all?"

"Need you *say* you are going to take the homeward-bound steamer back?" she retorted scornfully. "You land as they land, and each go your own way. See here—have you counted how many days we have been out? how many more it will be before even at the quickest passage you can get back to London?"

"Well?"

"Tell me frankly, have you ever been on a holiday trip—in Europe, I don't include your American tour—so long before without writing to your people?"

"No," he admitted very reluctantly, for the habit of truth was

strong in him, in spite of his having just committed himself to a course of falsehood.

"Then do you not see that another week—that every *day*—is of importance? If no suspicion is to be aroused about your absence, you must return at once—at once—make what excuse you can for your four weeks of silence, take up the thread of your daily life again, and try to *forget* all this."

"I can as well return from Quebec as from Rimouski," he said, still adhering somewhat sullenly to that idea.

"And lose a week of precious time," she repeated, "and refuse to comply with the desire you promised me to grant!"

"You do not know how much you are asking," he still demurred, "when you ask me to sacrifice the one more day with you that I had counted upon."

Asenath was silent for a few moments, her pride at war with the feminine instinct in her. She did not wish a conflict with Ray, yet she meant to have her will. She knew she could lead, but doubted whether she could drive him; she felt that she *could* conquer, but must conquer by women's weapons; and as a rule she let these severely alone—turned away in proud disdain from the legitimate armoury of her sex. Unerring instinct now urged her to resort to them; yet she hesitated reluctantly before she yielded to it, and allowed something of her heart to reveal itself in her voice and eyes.

"I did not think," she said a little reproachfully, yet with a faint, faint glimpse of tender trustfulness, "that you would refuse me the only reparation you can make for all the trouble and distress that you have brought on me! Don't wrong yourself by letting me think I have been mistaken when I put faith in your promise to obey my wishes, whatever they might be. I ask you this—the last thing I shall ever ask of you—the only thing you can do for me. You will not let me ask in vain?"

"No, there is nothing—nothing on earth that you shall ever ask in vain of me! Forgive me if I seemed to hesitate; it was only that it is tearing my heart out to leave you! I will go ashore to-night, and take the steamer back to-morrow!"

It was late at night—a dark, still, mild and moonless night, and they were nearing Rimouski fast. The "Sicilian" was cutting her swift and steady way through the smooth waters of the St. Lawrence. Along the sides of the vessel the phosphorescent waves fled like snowy flames. Many of the passengers were gathered on deck, late as was the hour; amongst them were Mr. Percival and Mrs. Fitzallan, leaning over the bulwarks watching the pale silver-shining foam flash and play like lambent fire about the ship, making her track through the dark waters a path of light—watching, too, the dark outlines of the land take shadowy shape, and looking out for the tug-boat to emerge from those distant shadows.

"I am doing your bidding," said Ray abruptly, breaking a silence; the interludes of silence between them this night were longer than the passages of conversation, and it had been fragmentary and spasmodic talk at best. "I am going in obedience to you. Tell me, before I go, am I fully forgiven? am I trusted again?"

"Yes."

"You do—you *will* trust me now?"

"I do not know why I should," she replied in a low voice, "and yet—I *do*!"

"There's one more thing," he continued earnestly. "I did not mean to say it, but now at this last hour I will—I *must* ask you. If I had been happy enough to meet you years ago—before you were—married"—he paused before he compelled himself to utter the hated word—"if I had been first in the field, would there have been a chance for me?"

She wished to rebuff, rebuke him for this; but somehow she could not force herself to reply anything harsher than, "It is a question you ought not to ask, nor I to answer."

"It *is* answered," he said in a very low suppressed voice. "You do not say *No*! If we had not met too late, I would have *made* you care for me!"

"Do not talk so," she said, shrinking back; "do not make me angry just at the last. Let us part in peace!"

"No, you must not be angry with me at the last, and I could not bear my life if we did not part in peace."

Just then a rocket shot up to the sky above their heads, and then another burst and blazed and whizzed in an upward line of fire. Then something that looked like a gigantic glow-worm came skimming over the smooth black water. It was the little pilot-boat; the great vessel lay still as the pilot clambered on board; and the subdued buzz of expectancy ran through the ranks of the watching passengers gathered along the bulwarks. Next, what seemed a great blaze of coloured lights grew out of the darkness that brooded over the land, and as it drew nearer and nearer it resolved itself into a big white boat lit up with red and green lamps.

Eager exclamations rose above the murmur and buzz.

"It is the tender! The tender is coming!"

Ray's hand touched Asenath's as it rested on the bulwarks—touched, then gently but firmly slipped round and clasped it.

"I wonder if any one else on board *hates* the sight of that tender as I do?" he said in a low concentrated voice.

"It is coming near," she replied with a sort of forced and hurried coolness, "you really must go. See, the passengers for the land are all going below. You must go now."

"Not yet; it is not near yet," he pleaded, holding her hand fast in his. "Say one kind word to me now, at the last. You have

been an angel—an angel of goodness—to me these last few days. Won't you, now that it is good-bye, say it kindly? Call me by my own name! Once, *once* you called me so. Won't you, at this last minute, call me Ray once more?"

He felt the slender fingers tremble and quiver in his before she almost tore her hand away. She drew a long deep breath like a sigh, and answered him in a low voice which it cost her an effort to control:

"Good-bye then, Ray—good-bye! and I pray that we two may never meet again!"

"The only prayer of yours to which I cannot say Amen!" he rejoined. "I feel in my soul to-night that I am *not* leaving you for ever! It is written that we shall meet again!"

"Not by my will, nor with my consent," she answered steadily. "It will be best for us both that this parting to-night should be for ever!"

"And if it should be," he whispered, and caught her hand again, "if it should be for ever, you will not quite forget me?"

"Good-bye!" was all her answer. "You must go now."

The tender was alongside; the gang-plank was being thrust out. He pressed her hand to his lips and covered it with kisses. In the darkness and the confusion this form of farewell passed unobserved.

Another minute and she leant over the bulwarks alone. Yet a few minutes more, and she watched the passengers for the shore file one by one across the gangway. Among those dusky forms passing in the shadows below, she knew that one tall well-knit figure and easy swinging step. He turned and looked back and up at her—stood looking at her till the last, till the tender swung away and the revolving engines churned up the smooth water into foam between the two vessels, and in the blur of moving shadow she lost sight of Ray.

It was a mild and balmy night, but when Asenath went below to her cabin she shivered; she was very cold—cold to her heart, on which there seemed to press an icy weight.

The disquietude which oppressed her was made up of curiously mingled and conflicting sensations, dominant among which was something like terror and dismay. She was not generally given to fear; but now a vague dread possessed her—fear of the past, of the future, of—she knew not what, but perhaps it was of *herself*!

She sought refuge from the tumult of feeling in reminding herself reassuringly that Ray had never, never breathed the word "*love*" to her—never told her in plain words that he loved her—only twice had kissed her hand, and once was at that parting moment, when surely such a farewell might be permitted to one with whom she had stood so near to death! But she reaped no comfort from these paltry and futile self-assurances, which conscience and reason told her were merely evasions. She knew too

well—perhaps better than if he had poured out protestations of his passion—that Ray loved her.

She endeavoured to dwell upon the relief his departure was to her—solaced herself by reflecting that she could breathe free air now that he had taken himself out of her path. He was gone—it was all over—over for good and all; and she was glad, glad—so glad!

But still her heart was thrilled and chilled by a foreboding dread that all was *not* yet over between her and Ray Percival!

CHAPTER XV.

CROSS CURRENTS.

“Said I not that all sin must chase
From the spell’s sphere the spirits of grace,
And yield their rule to the evil race?”

Ah, would to God I had clearly told
How strong those powers, accurst of old!”

RAY PERCIVAL found himself back in England within four weeks from the time he had left it; and, as he had openly made his plans for a six weeks’ absence, he resolved to cut straight across country to the Continent and make a fortnight’s tour in Switzerland, thus avoiding inquiry as to his unexpectedly early return, and also giving some colouring of truth to his account of himself. He wrote home as soon as he crossed the Swiss frontier; but did not succeed in entirely warding off inquiries, as it was close on five weeks from his leaving home before his letter from Geneva arrived in London; and on his return, after the first glad greetings, Mrs. Percival at once came to the question:

“But, Ray, how could you leave me five whole weeks without so much as a line?”

“Why, mater, you know I told you not to expect much in the way of correspondence, and I didn’t think you’d worry as I’d said that. And the time slipped away somehow.”

“It was rather cruel of you, Ray,” she said in a tone of tender reproach she seldom used to *him*, “not to send me so much as a post-card—to keep me all these weeks in such anxiety and suspense, when only one word in your writing would have made me happy!”

“Well, but I did send you a post-card,” he protested, anxious to soothe her wounded feelings, and reflecting that, as he stood committed to a course of falsehood, one lie more or less would not matter! “I suppose you didn’t get it. I daresay a lot of post-cards get lost.”

"Where did you post it?"

"I forget; how can I remember every little thing?" he replied shortly, with an impatient frown.

His unusual irritability roused her curiosity; she looked at him with a questioning expression that deepened into searching earnestness.

"My boy," she said anxiously, "was there—any reason? anything behind your silence?"

"No!—my good heavens! what should there be?" he retorted with increased impatience. "Are you going to make my life a burden to me now I have come home, by cross-questioning me as if I were a criminal in the French dock?"

The tears rushed unbidden to Mrs. Percival's eyes; Ray was the one creature in the world from whom so much as a single hard or hasty word always wounded her to the heart.

He felt remorseful and thought what a brute he was!

"There, there, don't!" he said hastily and caressingly. "I didn't mean it; but you know I always hate to be cross-questioned! And you shouldn't fret and worry about me whenever I am out of your sight. Nought never came to harm, you know. And—and," seeking as much excuse for himself and sailing as near the truth as possible, "I wasn't very well the first few weeks, and I waited to see how I got on. I knew you'd fidget if I told you——"

"My darling!" she exclaimed with fond anxiety; "I *knew* there must be something! Did you have advice? Did you consult the best doctors? Why didn't you come straight back home to me to be looked after?"

"Oh, the change and fresh air were the best things for me; they soon set me up, and I'm as right as a trivet now!"

"But you do *not* look quite well yet, dearest," she said anxiously.

He had most successfully directed all her thoughts out of the channel of curiosity about his movements, and into that of anxiety about his health. Still she did not feel quite satisfied with his manner whenever his Swiss tour was mentioned; she observed that he avoided allusion to his travels, and warded off the subject with an evasiveness and an irritability which were uncommon in Ray, habitually frank and straightforward and—at least at home—good-tempered, because nothing was ever allowed to cross him. However, she attributed any variability in his spirits and temper to indisposition; evidently he had not quite recovered from the feverish attack to which he pleaded guilty.

Geoffrey was away pheasant shooting with Lord Rockleigh when Ray came back, but he returned to town in the course of a few days.

The Percivals had not seen much of Dr. Fitzallan since his wife's departure. About a week after Ray's return he called,

but the two did not meet. By this time, of course, the doctor had received a letter from his wife; she had written by the steamer following the one on which Ray had crossed, so that Ray, on coming home that evening, heard as a piece of news of Mrs. Fitzallan's safe arrival in Quebec, and that she had had rather bad weather on the voyage, and an alarm one night when the engines broke down.

Ray felt guilty and uncomfortable as he listened to his mother's sympathetic comments on poor Mrs. Fitzallan's being all alone. Indeed he did not find the path of dissimulation was one of roses—it was thickly set with thorns, and scarce a day passed that he did not feel a prick.

Dr. Fitzallan still mesmerized Eileen Dundas occasionally, as much for his own interest now as for her advantage, her attacks of neuralgic pain being at present few, slight and far between, thanks to the magnetic treatment. Dr. Fitzallan had effected several other more or less complete cures; he had published his pamphlet on medical magnetism, and delivered a couple of lectures on the same subject, admission free, in a hall of modest dimensions which he just succeeded in filling. He was certainly making his way; he was beginning to be a good deal talked of in a certain circle, although even inside that circle there were a few, as outside of it there were many, who briefly set him down as a quack and a charlatan—the only terms which seemed to them applicable to a doctor of unknown antecedents, who came with an American diploma from the other side of the world and practised a treatment unsanctioned by professional orthodoxy, which savoured of the uncanny.

The next time he called at the Percivals' he found only Eileen and Ray in the drawing-room. A cheerful fire blazed on the hearth; the coolness of autumn was in the outer air; Eileen, in her usual low, lounging chair at one side of the fire, was dreamily turning over a novel; Ray had a bigger and more important-looking arm-chair drawn up to the other side of the hearth, and was extended in a comfortable attitude reading *The Times*. There was a very peaceful and domestic air about these two young people, sitting with their books and newspapers in sociable silence; for these cousins, brought up together from childhood in fraternal intimacy, felt no responsibility concerning each other's entertainment—no duty to make conversation when they were together.

"You look very comfortable here," observed Dr. Fitzallan with his slight calm smile, which barely curved his lips and did not rise to his eyes. "You are settled at home again, Mr. Percival? The east wind outside makes one feel that home is a good place to-day."

The two men greeted each other courteously, but without any real cordiality. An antagonism born of the consciousness that Fitzallan had just cause of quarrel with him—if that was known

which never should be known!—tended to stiffen Ray's manner; but the strenuous desire to preserve appearances in all ways for Asenath's sake made him careful to observe all forms of courtesy.

"And how are you, Miss Eileen?" Fitzallan inquired.

"Very well, except that this horrid wind has brought on my neuralgia a little, and I didn't sleep well last night."

"Then it is fortunate I called. Would you like me to mesmerize you?"

Eileen smiled assent as she looked up gratefully.

"Shall I be in the way?" asked Ray, divided between a reluctance to intrude if he was not wanted, and a feeling that it was right that he, as a representative of the family, as Eileen's natural guardian in his mother's absence, should make a third at the interview.

"Not the least," Dr. Fitzallan assured him. "That is, provided you do not exercise any opposing influence over your cousin. I notice that she is remarkably sensitive to conflicting influences, and they are not beneficial for her."

"I shall exercise no influence of any sort," said Ray; "I suppose you do not count a measure of mild curiosity as an influence?"

"By no means," Fitzallan replied. "On the contrary, we are always glad to inspire curiosity, as the first stage of interest."

"I am interested already," said Ray, judiciously suppressing the fact that his approbation was several degrees behind his interest, as he watched Dr. Fitzallan going through the now familiar process of magnetizing his patient. He did not send her to sleep at once, but first made a few passes over her temple and brow, the spot where the neuralgia was then centred, and presently asked her if it was better.

"Yes, your hand draws the pain out—quite out; it is gone now," she replied, looking up with submissive, trustful eyes.

"And now you had better have a little sleep," he suggested.

She leant her head back against her chair; he passed his fingers lightly across her brow, and soon her eyes closed, and with a deep gentle sigh she sank into sleep.

"Now," said the doctor, surveying her with a satisfied air, "now, Mr. Percival, I should like to show you one or two curious effects which I think you have not happened to see before."

"Try no experiments for me that are not likely to be good for my cousin," said Ray.

"I should not dream of trying any experiment that could possibly be harmful to her, for *any one*," Fitzallan replied coldly and firmly. Then, bending over the sleeping girl, he addressed her.

"Miss Eileen—open your eyes!"

She obeyed.

"There is no one in the room with us. is there?"

"No," she replied.

"Look round and see for yourself that there is no one here?"

"I see there is no one," she said, as her eyes looked full at Ray and passed over him as if he were empty air.

It gave him a curious and uncomfortable sensation when those eyes, to which his face had been familiar from childhood, looked at him and saw him not. The soft dark eyes were open; their regard seemed clear and conscious; yet the soul behind them was blind, the senses sealed to all perceptions save those which the magnetizer chose to permit. A word and a gesture of this comparative stranger's, and *he*, her cousin and old familiar friend, was simply blotted out of existence for her. He did not speak, not fully understanding the conditions, and fearing that his voice, he being invisible to her, might have some injurious effect; however, he need not have apprehended, for Fitzallan could as easily render her deaf to his voice and dead to his touch as blind to his face.

Dr. Fitzallan proceeded to one or two simple common experiments, such as he had often tried with Eileen before—holding a card or paper behind her head, and making her read through his sight the words her own eyes had not seen and could not see.

Ray looked on in silence, with a strange new thrill of disquietude and misgiving, as a fuller realization than he had felt before of this man's power grew upon him. The consciousness of the force and the peril of this influence had never so thoroughly penetrated him as it did now, that he found himself virtually alone with Fitzallan, watching his work—alone, for there was no sense of companionship with the senseless sleeper, whose individual soul-life was suspended at the mesmerizer's will—whose mind was impervious to all impressions save those which *he* allowed to enter it—the gates of her senses shut and locked, and the key held in his hand.

The power of the man impressed Ray painfully. What if those piercing eyes could look into *his* heart and read the secret there? The idea shot into his mind and rankled. And—worse still!—if *he*, her husband, could read Asenath's heart and force her to reveal what she wished to withhold!

Then he realized again remorsefully, thinking of this, how irreparably he, who would have died for Asenath, might in his rash recklessness have injured her. Proud, pure and innocent as she was, he had compromised her, entangled her in a secret, exposed her to slanderous misconstructions. And what if on her return the force of this man's strange influence should compel her to confess the secret, which indeed was no sin nor fault of hers, but to which the very secrecy gave the aspect of a story of wrong? Then, again, remembering all he knew of Asenath, with the keen intuition of love, he felt an instinctive and reassuring conviction that, however powerful might be her husband's mesmeric force, he could exercise no such influence over his wife. Asenath stood outside and beyond the circle of his power.

He was thinking thus while Dr. Fitzallan satisfied himself by the successful carrying out of his experiments. Presently he turned away from his patient, and looking at Ray, beckoned him to the other end of the room.

"That was all very satisfactory, was it not?" he observed with unusual geniality.

"Perfectly."

"Now there is another experiment I should like to show you to-day. Some simple object will do," Fitzallan added, glancing over the various articles of ornament and utility on a side-table. "This Japanese case—what is inside it?"

"Paper and envelopes," replied Ray, opening it to make sure he was right.

"Ah, that will do."

"She can hear us, can she not?" suggested Ray.

"No; I have willed her to sounder sleep; she takes no notice of anything. Yes, leave that case where it is. Now let us see what the time is." He returned to the hearth and glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. "A quarter to four. You will be here at—let us say—half-past four?"

"Yes, I suppose so, as far as I know," replied Ray.

"Very well. Now, Miss Eileen, your attention a moment," he said.

She looked up obediently.

"At half-past four o'clock you are to go to the side-table, open the Japanese case, the one with scarlet and silver birds on the cover, and take out an envelope and give it to your cousin, Mr. Percival. You understand? I desire you to do this at half-past four."

"Yes."

"You will take care to be here at half-past four," he added to Ray, "else it may distress her not to be able to carry out my instructions. She will not have the slightest recollection of anything that has passed—but at the hour she will obey me! And now we will waken her up."

A few passes of the hand and Eileen was awake. She looked up and smiled as she glanced from Dr. Fitzallan to Ray.

"Well, Eily," observed the latter, "feel better for your nap?"

"Yes. I always do."

Ray looked at her curiously.

"Do you really not remember anything at all about what you have been—dreaming—and saying?" he asked.

"No, Ray. What have I been saying?" she rejoined with a shade of uneasiness, a little colour rising in her cheeks.

"Oh, nothing much. You haven't been letting out any of your secrets, child," he answered, with a kind, reassuring smile, "only just saying 'Yes' and 'No' to questions."

"Your cousin is witness that you have told no tales in your

sleep, Miss Eileen," Dr. Fitzallan added with his usual half-paternal, half-friendly air to Eileen.

In a few minutes they heard Kate Dundas's laughing voice in the hall and the patter of her quick step running upstairs.

"There's Kitty come back," said Eileen in a tone of interest.

"I wonder if she has been to Marshall and Snelgrove's for me?"

"Another new dress, Eily?" interposed Ray.

"I think, if you will excuse me," she continued, looking up at Dr. Fitzallan with her pretty appealing smile, "I'll go and see. For," she added more to herself, "if Kitty has forgotten about it, I must write."

Intent on the important question of her new blue *broché*, Eileen vanished.

"She will come back by half-past four," observed Dr. Fitzallan; "unless indeed any one locks her in, and then she will get hysterical."

"We must see that nothing interferes with her, then; we don't want the girl in hysterics," said Ray, who regarded himself as his cousin's natural guardian in the absence of his mother and of Geoffrey.

"Yours is a fearful power, Dr. Fitzallan," he added after a minute's thoughtful silence, looking at him intently.

"It is a power the exercise of which might be attended with disastrous consequences, if it were exercised with evil thoughts or for evil purpose," Fitzallan replied in his cold, steadfast, deliberate tones. "But it is seldom that this power is entrusted to hands likely to use it for evil. And should it be so used, there is the certainty of a terrible recoil on the head of the evil-doer, hereafter, if not here; for sin committed by means of misuse of the faculty given for good, is crime doubly-dyed."

He was looking straight into Ray's eyes, though not more steadily and searchingly than Ray looked into his. There was something subtle and secret in the one gaze, with all its freedom; the other was simply a look of open and fearless questioning. Their piercing glances met, as if the two were mentally measuring each other's forces; and there was no room for doubt that in the event of there ever being any manner of conflict between these two, Ray Percival would be entirely at a disadvantage, unless indeed it should take the unlikely form of a mere trial of physical strength. In such a case, perhaps, Ray, taller, younger, and to all appearance stronger, might come off conqueror, though even that was doubtful. In nothing but mere muscle and sinew could he possibly be a match for the elder man. And yet he felt, as their glances crossed, as if there were some force within him that some day, somehow, would give the battle to his hands.

"You could not mesmerize me," he said, rather in quiet assertion than in inquiry.

"No," Fitzallan admitted freely; "I could not. There is

probably somewhere in the world some person who could. But you are not within the range of my influence. I could tell that the first hour I saw you."

"As you knew at once that you *could* mesmerize my cousin Eileen? I suppose she is one of the best subjects you have ever had?"

"By no means. Your cousin's are not the highest faculties. She has shown no signs of true clairvoyance. I cannot unseal her eyes to see more than I see. She can tell me nothing that I do not myself *will* her to know and to tell. Besides, there are limits to my power over her. There are influences that dominate her nature which are strong enough to conflict with mine. I perceive a clear line drawn, beyond which I can exercise no control. No; Miss Eileen is an interesting subject, but not one of the best—far from it."

Ray felt somehow glad to hear it. It was satisfactory to know that there were limits to Fitzallan's power.

Then Kitty and Eileen came in, and tea was brought up, and Kitty poured it out, and the little group gathered round the tea-table were enjoying a sociable desultory chat, when Ray, casting a surreptitious glance at the clock, perceived that it wanted only a few minutes to the half-hour. He looked at Dr. Fitzallan, who was quietly stirring his tea, but who had also silently observed the time. He never turned his eyes on Eileen; Ray, watching, noticed this. There was no glance, if ever so brief, to suggest to her mind the directions given her during her sleep; and indeed no eloquent look could have reminded her of what she had completely forgotten on waking; but as the minute-hand neared the half-hour, the girl set down her cup and looked round uneasily. She pushed her chair back with a restless movement, and got up and walked to the fire as if to warm herself; then in an aimless, uncertain kind of manner she sauntered to the side-table and began fidgeting with the ornaments there. Presently she took up the Japanese case, and after fingering it for a moment in an absent, motiveless way, she opened it and took out an envelope. Dr. Fitzallan and Ray looked at each other. Eileen came back to the tea-table holding the envelope carelessly in her hand, and after looking over the table with a hesitating glance, she put it upon Ray's plate.

"Well!" exclaimed Kate, with a burst of laughter. "What are you thinking of, Eileen? Do you suppose Ray wants to eat an envelope? Does he like stationery for his tea? You had really better give him a piece of hot cake. Why on earth have you given him that envelope?"

"I don't know, I am sure," murmured Eily, blushing. "I thought—I felt somehow as if"—she hesitated and looked bewildered—"I fancied—he"—she glanced at him appealingly—"Ray, didn't you want an envelope?"

A few days after this, Eileen was sitting alone, embroidering a border of her own designing—this was Eileen's one talent, and she took a *naïve* pride and pleasure in watching the silken flowers grow and blossom under her dainty fingers—when she heard a well-known voice in the hall and step on the stair.

The girl's heart leapt, and with a startled movement of pleasure she let her needle slip from her hands. Geoffrey! and she was alone! She would have him all to herself now, if only for a little while.

Geoffrey came in, with his usual effect of bringing a strong genial breeze into the room with him.

"All alone, Eily? Where are the rest?"

"Kitty and Rhoda have gone with the Greys to a concert; Momie and Gertie are lunching at the Houghtons'," she replied, and the colour flickered on her cheek with the mingling of unaccountable pain and stinging pleasure she often felt now in Geoffrey's presence, which used once to be such a pure and unalloyed delight.

Geoffrey pulled forward the big arm-chair which was sacred to him—"Geoffrey's chair"—and threw himself into it, observing, "Biting cold out to-day."

Eileen put down her embroidery and hastened to make up the fire, stir the dull red glow to a blaze, and put on fresh coals.

"Never mind, baby," said Geoffrey. "If the fire's good enough for you, it's good enough for me. Here!" He took the coal-scoop from her hand and shovelled the coals liberally on to the fire himself. "I hate to see a woman's little hands blacked," he remarked.

Eileen lingered half-kneeling, half curled up in one of the nestling attitudes that were so natural and habitual to her on the hearthrug. He looked down into her upturned face with a kind, even tender, smile, and an unusual softness in his blue eyes, yet a sort of abstraction in his look, as if he were looking beyond her at something or somebody else.

"So you're the only one at home, little one?" he said. "Well, you'll be the first to hear my news; will you be the first to congratulate me?" The ruddy hue of health deepened quickly in his face as he spoke, and as suddenly her delicate paleness whitened.

"I will," she protested hastily. "I will be first. No one shall be before me. But what is the subject of congratulation?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Is it—is it about—Lady May?"

"You've guessed it, baby," he said, smiling happily. "Now, am I not to be congratulated?"

"*She* is," the girl replied, impetuously blurting out her true thought. "And *you* too, of course, Geoffrey," she added hurriedly, with a sudden burning flush. "You are very, very

much to be congratulated, I'm sure ; she is so lovely, and no one —no one can wish you joy, can rejoice in your happiness more truly than I do," she went on, breathless with feverish haste. "I do congratulate you with all my heart !"

"I'm sure of it, Eily," he said affectionately. "We've always been such good friends, haven't we, you and I? And now you will be fond of—of May, won't you? and sisterly to her? She never had any sisters, and she's often felt lonesome."

"And now she will come in for four sisters, cousins and nieces, all ready-made!" exclaimed Eileen laughingly ; Geoffrey did not detect the half-hysterical ring in her laughter.

"Yes, and I hope you'll all be fond of her," he rejoined, with a touch of simplicity and tenderness that went straight to Eileen's heart.

"We *will*," she protested earnestly ; and a sudden light, that was a passionate promise of faith and loyalty, glowed in her soft eyes.

Geoffrey bent and kissed the little pale face with a kind and brotherly kiss.

"There, that seals the compact ! What a shy little fawn you are, Eily," he added, tapping her crimson cheek with a careless caress. "It isn't so many years since you used to sit on my knee and hug me like a young bear !"

"You are getting zoological in your similes," she laughed. "I've outgrown the ursine stage."

"It wasn't a very good simile for *you*, any way," Geoffrey admitted candidly. "The fawn is better—you *are* rather like a little fawn, with big soft eyes."

"You are improving," she replied gaily. "Under Lady May's influence we shall have you turning out some pretty, poetical and complimentary metaphors yet."

"Poetical things will never be much in my line," he observed. "But May read me some poetry the other day, and I liked it."

It seemed probable that just at the present epoch May would be the burden of Mr. Carresford's conversation.

Presently the rest of the family party returned by instalments, and on hearing Geoffrey's news all were as congratulatory, as warmly and as delightfully excited and interested as even Geoffrey could desire. Eileen kept up brightly and bravely all the day, and talked and laughed even more than usual. But at night her sister, whose room communicated with hers, thought she heard a low sound of stifled sobbing, and going in to see what was the matter, found Eileen lying dressed upon her bed, drowned in tears and quivering with suppressed sobs.

"Eily, dear, what is it?"

Eileen turned away and buried her face in the pillows.

"Are you in pain, dear? Shall I call Momie? Yes, let me. Momie will find something to do you good."

"No, no, *no*," murmured Eileen vehemently, seizing her sister's arm to detain her. "Not Momie—*no one*!"

"You are upset about something, dear Eily. Is it—is it about Geoffrey?"

"No, *no*!" But a shuddering tremor ran through all her frame as Kate asked that question. "At least, why should I care? I don't care, and yet—Oh! leave me alone, Kitty! Go away!"

She tore her hand from Kate's and pressed both hands over her hidden face and shook with convulsive stifled sobs.

"My poor darling," said Kate, putting her arms tenderly round the little shivering figure. "My little Eily!"

Kate had not very quick perceptions, nor as a rule particularly deep feelings; but she had womanly sympathy enough to read at last her little sister's heart, and to know that at this hour there were no words to be said which could comfort—that for the pain of unsought love, with its burden of maiden shame, wounded modesty and mortified pride, there is no cure but time—no balm but sympathetic silence.

The next day Eileen was ill and feverish; her neuralgia came on badly, and Mrs. Percival sent for Dr. Fitzallan.

Gertrude and Rhoda went off with Momie to initiate the new relationship with Lady May by a prompt visit in their new characters as relatives to be.

Kate stayed at home with her sister; but as Dr. Barnabas Grey and his mother and sister happened to call, Kate received and entertained them in the drawing-room, leaving Eileen with Dr. Fitzallan in the library.

Eileen was looking white and fragile as a lily; her paleness was not of the sallow and sickly kind, but clear and transparent. Her large eyes had a mournful yet steadfast look, as though inuring themselves to facing grief. She had on a pale blue morning-robe of some soft clinging material, trimmed with filmy lace of a creamy hue; and altogether there was a flower-like delicacy and charm about the little "lily maid."

"You are very pale, Miss Eileen," Dr. Fitzallan observed, looking at her kindly and keenly. "But that soft blue woollen dress suits you well. Woollen is favourable to the magnetic influences too; and blue and green are the correspondences of love and peace and good will. This is no mere fancy; every emotion has its corresponding colour; and the aura of each individual is coloured by the elements of the soul; though this coloured aura is of course not be seen by our bodily eyes. Some of those who wear the fairest seeming in the world's eyes have an aura of lurid red—the livery of evil! But *your* aura is blue—the correspondence of an innocent soul. Come, let me put you to sleep now, you poor little pale girl, and charm away that pain in your temples. I shall be able to, don't you think?"

"Yes, you always do me good," she replied with her trustful smile, and yet with a faint involuntary sigh.

Fitzallan felt suddenly inclined to echo that sigh; indeed he did in his heart, only in a more bitter and gloomy tone. There was something in that tender trustful softness of Eileen's, in the dewy morning freshness of her simplicity and innocence, in the unconsciously and pathetically wistful look in the depths of her dark humid eyes—that sent his thoughts, with a bitter sense of contrast, to his wife! Asenath was as pure, as true as this girl; but if only he could find in her one touch of Eileen's soft and tender simplicity, of her pathetic trustfulness, and transparent faith and love! Life might have been very different to him, he thought, if he had married a creature gentle and confiding as this.

He was keen-sighted enough to detect that Eileen's feverish weakness and depression was rather moral than physical, due rather to a troubled spirit than to the cold which Momie supposed her to have caught. He also coupled this disturbance of mind with the news of Geoffrey Carresford's engagement. He had established a more intimate confidence with Eileen when in the trance-state than in her waking hours; he liked to look deep down into the clear crystal waters of this simple transparent soul.

It was just the way of the world, he said to himself, that that big hulking brute, so utterly unworthy of this pure, soft, sweet heart, passed her by for a vain, pretty, fluttering butterfly creature like Lady May.

"You are unhappy, are you not, Eileen?" he said to her when her will and her senses were fast-bound in the mesmeric sleep.

"Yes," she answered in the level dream-like tone that was usual to her at those times.

"I will not ask you why; but I *know*! Do you not feel that I know your sorrow?"

"Yes."

"And can I not help you?"

"No. You can cure me when I am ill; but no one can help me here."

"Yet perhaps I can help you more than you think, my child. I tell you not to despond, I give you hope! Strange and unexpected things may happen yet. Trust in me when I tell you not to despair. You are a fair and winning creature, Eileen—you may yet win your heart's desire. We know not what strange developments may be enfolded in the future. Hope, be brave, bear a cheerful heart. Perhaps even I may help you yet."

He could not have explained to himself why he took this tone, except that he wished to test his influence over Eileen by essaying his power to strengthen her morally as well as physically, and to prove whether the effect of words thus spoken to her in her trance would endure in her waking hours.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER ONE ROOF.

" Dream-like glow of a rapt noon hour,
Rose-tinted rapture that may not last,
Heaven seen clear between shower and shower,
Dawn colour ruined by day's overcast ! "

GEOFFREY CARRESFORD'S engagement to Lady May Rivers was received with general satisfaction. Lord Rockleigh, who always had a cordial liking for his old schoolfellow Carresford, was well satisfied with the match, and Lady Rockleigh accepted it contentedly, if not enthusiastically. Mr. Carresford's views with regard to settlements were certainly quite satisfactory; and she admitted that May might have done very much worse.

Geoffrey's family were delighted. Some people doubted whether Mrs. Percival could really be quite as well-pleased as she seemed—as the probable result of her brother's marriage would be to cut her son out of his prospective interest in the Carresford property, which he would inherit, failing offspring of Geoffrey's. Mary Percival, however, was too honest to feign a warmth she did not feel, and too unselfish to grudge her brother his happiness, in which, indeed—holding Geoffrey only next dear to Ray and Rhoda—she truly rejoiced. Nor was any one more sincere in the expressions of congratulation than Ray himself.

" Mustn't be a dog-in-the-manger," he observed in rather rueful soliloquy. " We can't all be lucky. I suppose we must take the rough and smooth between us; and if *I* can't be happy, if my desire's beyond my reach, at least I'm glad that one of us has got his wish, and Geoff will be happy ! "

And Geoffrey, in a sort of silent understanding and appreciation of the position, treated Ray with even extra-affectionate cordiality.

Lady May made herself charming to her future family-in-law. She came in amongst them like sunshine—not that any outside sunshine was needed to lighten up that bright and cheery household, wherein the only two who had skeletons to hide kept them carefully locked up; for Eileen, folding her innocent secret close in her heart in shrinking maiden shame, was scarcely more anxious to conceal it from all eyes than was Ray to guard the secret of the mad, hopeless, sinful passion that gnawed like a hidden wolf at his breast.

Geoffrey beamed with silent pleasure as he saw his *fiancée* and his family on such cordial and intimate terms. She was quite ready to take Ray into the charmed circle of affectionate familiarity.

" I am going to call you *Ray* now," she said sweetly, " and you must call me *May* ! "

"Hardly respectful, to an aunt—would it be?" he demurred, smiling.

"An *aunt!*" she exclaimed, with a little *moue* of playful protest. "Now, I give you fair warning that I entirely and forever disown you in the light of a nephew! You may be a cousin, or a brother," and she looked up at him with softly smiling eyes.

"Yes, I should like that better," said Ray, sincerely enough; for May was a lovely and a winsome creature, although she was not in the least like *his* ideal of womanhood.

Geoffrey and May were thoroughly orthodox lovers; indeed, there was nothing sufficiently unconventional about either of them for them to strike out any novel and unorthodox line.

"What a handsome pair they make, do they not?" said Mrs. Percival one day, as she watched from the window Geoffrey folding May's scarf about her, and putting her into the carriage as if she were made of blown-glass, or something equally breakable.

"Yes, indeed. May looks like a picture to-day. I think Geoffrey *is* lucky to get such a charming wife," observed Kate.

"Well, for the matter of that," Mrs. Percival demurred, with sisterly loyalty, "I think any woman might very well go down on her knees and give thanks for winning such a husband as Geoffrey."

"On her knees! Oh, come, Momie," laughed Kate; "I suppose if any woman had the felicity of being *Ray's* choice, you would expect her to go on all-fours?" casting a saucy, sparkling glance at Ray.

"I wouldn't own I was thankful to be any mortal man's choice," exclaimed Rhoda, with a toss of her blonde head.

"I wouldn't ask you to own it publicly; but no woman need be ashamed of being thankful for the love of a man who is good and loyal, tender and true, *sans peur* and *sans reproche*! She ought to be proud of having won him—yes, and of being able to appreciate him," replied Momie, sticking stoutly to her views.

"I think there's very good ground for thankfulness on both sides when the right man gets the right woman," observed Ray.

"I suppose some day, dear, you'll be bringing me home a daughter?" said Mrs. Percival, with a half-sigh, when the girls had gone out of the room and left her alone with her son.

"How would you like that?" he asked.

"I should like anything that made my boy happy."

"Marriage is not an infallible panacea for happiness," rejoined Ray, with an amusing air of experience; "just the reverse—unless you're lucky enough to get the 'one woman.'"

"And you have not found the 'one woman,' Ray?" she said, with an earnest look of questioning.

"I won't be long about asking her when I do, you may be sure," he replied, with an undertone of bitter mirth at his own expense.

* * * * *

During the time that is apt to be the dreariest of the year in London—the time of swiftly-shortening days and lengthening evenings, of falling leaves, darkening skies and threatening fogs—Geoffrey and May basked in the sunshine of their own love and joy and hope. In both families the marriage plans and prospects of this happy pair were the subject of the day; the very air seemed teeming with the topic in its various branches—the *trousseau*, the wedding-tour, the choice of the house in Hyde Park; Geoffrey manifesting the greatest interest in the two last departments of the all-important subject, whilst May revelled in the delights of the first. And Mrs. Percival entered heart and soul into all the confidences and consultations of bride and bridegroom-elect which were extended to her—and they were many. And the girls were sympathetic and interested too; and Ray and Eileen kept their troubles to themselves. And Mrs. Fitzallan wrote with dutiful frequency to her husband, but thought she ought not to leave her uncle yet, as his condition was most critical; he was lying between life and death; and he seemed to think no one could nurse him as she could. And Dr. Fitzallan replied to her that she was on no account to think of return until the crisis of the poor old man's illness was past; and so the winter drew on apace.

Dr. Fitzallan seemed to get on very well without his wife; if he missed her, he never repined at her absence. He added a few new patients to his list, amongst them a Mr. Bartram, who was an old friend of Lady May and of her deceased husband. Mr. Bartram was suffering from a severe nervous affection; and Dr. Fitzallan treated him very successfully—though rather to the disgust of his family and friends, who seemed to regard it as more respectable to die under an orthodox physician than be cured by a quack. Besides, they held that it was really a mere fluke that Alfred Bartram chanced to get better just at the time this Anglo-American charlatan of a fellow took him in hand.

Mr. Bartram was of course introduced to the family of Lady May's *fiancé*; and thus there was an additional link of acquaintance formed between Dr. Fitzallan and the Carresfords and Percivals. Mr. Bartram was something of a faded fop, a dilettante exquisite; he liked the women of the Carresford family very much, and extended a temperate degree of approbation to Geoffrey; but he did not particularly take to Ray—perhaps because Ray, who was susceptible to fancies and likes and dislikes, did not take to *him*. Mr. Bartram considered that young Percival “gave himself airs;” Ray “had no patience with a fellow who laughed in falsetto, and looked as if he thought every woman was going to fall in love with him.”

The black fogs and white frost of the London winter gave Lady May a bad cold, which hung about her unusually long. Geoffrey, who was properly and laudably anxious about his *fiancée* if she had

so much as a headache, was very uneasy about her cough, and suggested hastening the marriage and taking her to the Riviera. May, however, did not at all approve of the idea of haste; it meant cutting short the wedding preparations; if there was one thing she disliked more than another, it was hurrying a trousseau; she had ordered some of her things from Paris, and she thought dressmakers never fitted properly if they were hurried. The doctor said a change of air would be the best thing for her, and she took a fancy to go to the Hygeia Hall at Meriton, where she had been for a fortnight the previous winter. It was a favourite resort of several of the Rockleighs' friends; and Mr. Bartram was going down there. So were a couple of other patients of Dr. Fitzallan, who now decided to spend at least a portion of his winter there, continuing his attention to these three patients—excellent ones in every sense, with a boundless belief in him and his treatment, and not so very much the matter with them—and also probably extending his practice through their recommendations.

To the Hygeia Hall also Lady May Rivers suggested a visit; she liked the place; the air was perfect; she was certain it would set up her strength; and she would return quite well and strong for the wedding. Geoffrey accepted the idea readily. Any place would be agreeable enough in his eyes to which May took a fancy. Lady Rockleigh did not care to go, having metal more attractive in town just then; but there was no difficulty about a chaperon. Mrs. Percival would be delighted to go with Lady May, and she would take Kitty and Eileen too—Kitty had a cough, and Eileen was never very well when the cold weather came on. Gertrude and Rhoda elected to stay in London, and Ray seemed at first uncertain whether he would join the Meriton party or remain at home.

"Better come with us, old fellow," said Geoffrey; "there's nothing very lively going on in town, and we shall be a jolly party at the Hygeia."

"Everybody being wheeled about in bath-chairs, I suppose, and taking Turkish baths and drinking fizzy temperance beverages, and comparing symptoms," observed Ray lazily.

"Good heavens forbid!" ejaculated Geoffrey, dismayed by this pleasant picture. "May says it's an awfully nice place, and more a pleasure than a health resort."

It was an agreeable combination of both, as they found when they got there. It certainly occupied the perfection of a position. To the north and east it was shut in by high hills covered and crowned with pine woods; to the west the hills declined in a gentler swell; and to the south the ground sloped away gradually into a sunny valley. Thus the Hygeia Hall lay sheltered from the coldest winds, enjoying the healthy balsamic air of the pine woods, and open to all the sunshine of the skies from dawn to dusk.

The gardens were large enough to lose one's self in, and beautifully laid out, with long stretches of velvety lawn, shrubberies,

rockeries, winding walks and summer-houses, recreation grounds, and a pond dignified by the name of The Lake, with a boat on it, while as a resort for cold weather, those too delicate to brave the open air even in that sheltered situation, had an ample range of conservatories long enough to take exercise in, besides an orangery and a vinery.

The advertisements which drew the attention of the public to the attractions of this establishment did not exaggerate in describing it as "replete with every arrangement conducing to health and happiness, both in and out of doors."

There were billiard and smoking rooms, of course, a tennis court, an aquarium, recreation and reading rooms, and a hall devoted to dances, concerts, and other entertainments. The first entrance produced a pleasant impression on the arriving guest: a wide and large hall, with a tessellated pavement, rich Oriental rugs and divans, and stained-glass windows, led into a court-yard covered in with a glass dome; in the middle of this court there was a fountain playing and gold fish darting about in a crystal clear, shallow pool; and round the four sides ran a sort of verandah, beautified by a luxuriant display of flowering shrubs, tall tree-ferns and dwarf palms.

The Hygeia Hall was such a success that they had added a wing, and put up two pavilions in the grounds, so close to the main building that they might be considered part of it, and the accommodation in them was so charged in the tariff—the only inconvenience of having quarters in the pavilions being the necessity of crossing a few yards of garden-ground to the dining and drawing rooms.

Mr. Carresford's party engaged the best rooms that were vacant at the time of their arrival. They were fortunate enough to secure five bedrooms and a small private sitting-room all together, in the same corridor, and all opening on a glass-covered, flower-decked balcony, up and down which they could walk in wet weather. The family party were sociably inclined; they liked to be all together, to pop in and out of each other's rooms and walk about outside each other's windows, all of which were fitted with lace curtains and Venetian blinds, so that entire privacy from passing eyes might be secured at will. There was no room for Mr. Bartram or Dr. Fitzallan in the main building, so they were accommodated in the West Pavilion, which was facing the apartments of the Carresford party, and so near that if it had not been for the intervening glass-roofed balcony they might have played battledore and shuttlecock across from window to window.

There was a doctor resident on the premises, though the guests were under no obligation to place themselves under his care as patients if they chose any other medical attendant.

Dr. Fitzallan's first move, as a matter of policy, was to fraternize with this Dr. Treherne; and he succeeded in carrying out his inten-

tion with less difficulty than might have been anticipated. Dr. Treherne believed in electric baths and massage; Dr. Fitzallan's views entirely coincided with his. Dr. Fitzallan consulted his colleague about a complication in Mr. Bartram's case, and showed a certain deference to his opinion which was especially flattering in a man so self-confident. Dr. Treherne soon admitted to himself that he found in Dr. Fitzallan a very interesting companion, with a fund of curious anecdote and uncommon experiences to relate; and he observed a discreet silence on the question of the advisability of introducing the mesmeric business into practice.

Altogether they were a happy and harmonious party gathered together at Hygeia Hall.

It was an ideal place for an engaged couple; it abounded in cosy nooks that seemed to be "made for lovers, and for lovers only." Sheltered spots in the Orangery and Vinery, curtained recesses in the drawing-rooms, seats under spreading shade of tall tropical ferns in the conservatories, offered opportunities for those delicious *tête-à-têtes* which affianced lovers seek, and to which, too, as a rule, their family and friends are all so kindly and considerably anxious to assist them. Geoffrey and May were like all lovers good and true; they took the goods the gods provided and were thankful, and would certainly never have to reproach themselves with neglected opportunities, lost chances, of enjoying the "time for golden dreams." No least little cloud of foreboding, no shadow of threatening disaster, darkened their sunny sky. In the bloom and prime of life, with health and wealth and beauty, warm hearts and sanguine spirits, they were as happy a pair of lovers as ever loved and laughed the hours and days away.

If Geoffrey desired any entertainment outside and beyond love-making, there was plenty of it provided; indoor and outdoor amusements in variety enough to suit all tastes—save, indeed, a taste as *exigeant* as that of the discontented man who died and went to heaven, and being asked there if he was not happy at last, replied, "Certainly not—they have given me a damp cloud to sit on, and my halo doesn't fit!"

Geoffrey found and fraternized with some congenial spirits; for the Hygeia guests were not all, as Ray had unkindly suggested, hypochondriacs and invalids; and Geoffrey was not exposed to the embarrassment of finding himself the only robust individual there.

He also enjoyed the agreeable consciousness that *his* party were the favoured guests—the pets of the place. Waiters and chamber-maids attended on them with their briskest and most assiduous air; the housekeeper went up to Lady May and Mrs. Percival to hope that everything in their rooms was arranged to their taste; their fellow-guests received them with open arms. There were, as Lady May observed with gentle satisfaction, "quite nice people" there; and all the nice people were charmed to make much of May,

who, alike as beauty and as bride-elect, was unanimously accepted as queen of the circle—"star of that goodly company."

Kate Dundas came in a good second to May; and failing Dr. Grey, bestowed her smiles on Mr. Bartram. The weather was propitious, the air agreed with them all; May and Kate speedily declared themselves all but recovered from their respective coughs and colds. Eileen, too, seemed much better for the change; indeed, the girl was determined that she would not allow herself to be ill; she *would* be well, bright, lively! She kept a brave and cheerful face even to Kate—perhaps all the more to Kate, because of that one moment's abandonment which had betrayed her secret and her grief. She had joined the party to Hygeia Hall, although she knew it would be an ordeal of daily suffering, partly because she felt that for these last few weeks before Geoffrey's marriage she would rather be near him than away from him, partly because, even though it *was* pain, the pain was wholesome, bracing; it trained and taught her to accept the position, to face the fact, that Geoffrey's path and hers divided now. And then Eileen Dundas was one of those women who, when the rose of love does not bloom for *their* gathering, will press the very thorns into their hearts; and these natures, apparently all weakness, like those fair fragile creepers that seem to have scarcely strength to cling, have often a quiet steadfast endurance of their own.

Thus Eileen, when once she had recognized the truth that she had grown up loving Geoffrey far too well, clasped her secret close in her heart, and bore the daily ordeal of his careless brotherly kindness with a smile—like Andersen's loveliest heroine, the "Little Mermaid," who felt at every step the sharp blades of knives cutting her little tender feet, yet never faltered.

One thorn that stung and rankled in Eileen's heart was the irresistible consciousness—which pained and grieved her, seeming, as it did to her sensitive conscience, disloyal—that she loved him better even than May did. May loved his handsome face, his comely figure—loved him in the splendour of his strength, his golden prime of health and prosperity; but Eileen was uncertain whether May's love was of the strongest quality. Many a blade may look as well and shine as bravely as the finest-tempered steel, but will not stand the strain of the test the tempered steel will endure. Eileen knew in her heart that her own love—ignored and passed by, not in neglect but in ignorance—was the love that would bear all tests, that no misfortune, suffering, disease, nor poverty—if such could ever befall their Geoffrey!—could shake her "marble-constant" devotion; that were he stricken, ruined, beggared, crippled, maimed and disfigured, he would be *her* idol still.

Eileen and Dr. Fitzallan were always very good friends. It seemed curious that there should be any attraction between these two natures, whose essential elements were as opposite as oil and

water. There could be no sympathy nor comprehension between them, so wide apart ran the lines of inherent purpose, of even potential feeling, in their lives ; but he was nearer to understanding the simple girl, in whom there was nothing but love and innocence and purity to read—whose very simplicity and transparent truth were just what made it difficult for *him* to understand *her*—than she could ever be to the faintest comprehension of one whom even his wife—Asenath, clear-sighted in reading all but her own heart—only imperfectly understood.

Eileen was not clever nor quick of perception ; she did not observe, analyze, nor reason ; but her instincts, so far as they went, were true. Although there was a certain coldness and hardness about Dr. Fitzallan, he was in all sincerity kindly disposed towards Eileen ; she realized that, and was grateful for his kindness, and felt a child-like trust in him, a trust which—on one point at least, if on only one—was not ill-placed, inasmuch as with all his strange, perilous, and almost unlimited power over her, there was nothing in his friendly regard for her from which the unerring instincts of her maiden purity could shrink.

Here, too, Mrs. Percival's womanly instincts had not led her astray. In many of her opinions of Dr. Fitzallan—indeed, in her general judgment of him—she was entirely and lamentably wrong ; but she was not wrong in trusting a girl as innocent as Eileen to his influence. Gervas Fitzallan was not a good man, though, like many other sinners, he was willing enough to tread the path of the saint, so long as he had no especial temptation to stray into a broader and less thorny path ; but he was not one of the gross and vulgar sinners from whom innocence and purity are in danger.

He liked little Eileen in all honesty, with the lukewarm regard which was all he was capable of feeling for any one but himself—except perhaps his wife, whom he did love still in his way—and he saw a good deal more of her now that Geoffrey's time and thoughts were devoted to his *fiancée*. He had at first wondered whether Geoffrey would marry Eileen. It would have been agreeable to him to have had, through his influence over Geoffrey Carresford's wife, some hold, however slight, on himself ; but he was the less disappointed, as things were, because he saw that the strongest factor in Eileen's nature was her affection for Geoffrey, and that in any conflict between his influence and Geoffrey's it would be *his* that would infallibly go to the wall ; and then he felt by this time quite safe and secure with Geoffrey Carresford. If Geoffrey had ever remembered, he had long ere now forgotten him. Meeting daily under the same roof, he had never caught a gleam of recognition in Geoffrey's indifferent glance—neither friendly nor inimical, simply indifferent.

Dr. Fitzallan had only been a few days at Hygeia Hall when a letter from his wife announced her proposed return on the steamer

following the one which bore her letter. Her uncle had passed the crisis, the dangerous operation which the doctors feared he could not survive had been successfully performed, and now the patient was on the mend; although it was not likely he would ever be strong again, he might live several years, and she thus felt free to return home to her husband. This letter crossed his to her, telling her of his arrival and intended sojourn at the Hygeia Hall at Meriton; and he then wrote to meet the steamer, directing her to take the train straight on to Meriton to join him.

Meanwhile, Ray Percival in London heard nothing of Asenath's movements. His mother wrote him glowing accounts of the delights of the place; but her mind was so full of Geoffrey and May, she did not think of mentioning any news of Dr. Fitzallan's wife. Ray, deliberating whether or not to join his mother at the Hygeia, was divided between a desire to go where he should probably hear news of Asenath, hear her spoken of, hear of her letters when they arrived, and a reluctance to throw himself into daily association with Fitzallan. Months had not cured Ray; his case was well-nigh as bad as ever. Hardly a day or night passed that the vision of that

"Passionless, pale, cold face—star-sweet on a gloom profound!"

did not float before his dreaming or waking eyes. The thought of Asenath was the mainspring of his inner life.

At Hygeia Hall he knew that he should at least be in daily communication with the one who was the only channel through which he could hope to hear of her—to learn the date of her return; yet he disliked the idea of that daily association with her husband. His feeling with regard to Dr. Fitzallan was not so much actual as potential dislike; it was a kind of doubt, ready to turn to hatred in a flash, but which, as yet, had not so turned. He finally made up his mind to go to Meriton, and wrote his intention to his mother the very day before she wrote a letter to him in which she mentioned—as a piece of pleasant, if not very important, news—that Mrs. Fitzallan had returned from Quebec and had just arrived at the Hygeia.

Ray's first impulse was to hail a hansom straightway and rush off to catch the first train to Meriton; but, on second thoughts, he reflected that, in consideration for *her*, he must avoid giving the slightest possible ground for curiosity or comment by hastening his movements; so he waited a couple of days, until the date he had already in his letter to Mrs. Percival fixed for his visit; those days and nights seemed to his burning impatience endless; and at their close he did as many have done before him—eagerly, without a warning, without a misgiving, he rushed blindfold upon his fate.

Arrived at Hygeia Hall, he was welcomed with effusion, and borne off to his room, which was in a line with those of the rest of

the party. Having washed off the dust of travel, he set out on a tour of inspection of the establishment, without seeking for any of his family to officiate as guide. One reason—though scarcely acknowledged even to himself—for this solitary peregrination was that he had not caught a glimpse of the Fitzallans on his arrival; the other—the reason ready for avowal—was to see where his dog Ponto, whom he often took on country visits with him, had been bestowed. In the large hall he first found the porter in whose charge Ponto had been led off to be lodged in the stable-yard, and having interviewed him on the subject of Ponto's disposal and welfare, as he turned to take his way towards the yard, on a visit to his dog, he found himself face to face with Mrs. Fitzallan. She had evidently just come in from a walk; she had on a fur-trimmed walking-costume, which set off her tall *svelte* figure to perfection, and a hat with long curled feathers drooping over the heavy braids of her hair, which had an indescribably soft and rich and eminently becoming effect. She was looking lovelier than ever, he thought at once; and as she saw him, a soft and sudden flush mantling in her usually pale cheek made her more beautiful still.

The porter had gone his way; they two met face to face alone. It seemed that all his heart flashed into his eyes as they looked into hers again; she put out her hand in a somewhat formal and constrained greeting; he took it very gently and reverently, and held it as though he could never let it go.

"You are well?" he said, dwelling intently on the fair flushed face, and too much in earnest for the conventional how do you do.

"Quite well," she replied, with a colder and more reserved air than his. "I did not know," she added, still more coolly, "that you would be here."

"I have not come unexpectedly," he said. "My coming here has been arranged for a week past. Did you not know? Did not my mother mention it?"

"Oh, yes, since I have been here. I meant that I did not know before," she said, drawing her hand firmly out of his, which had detained it until now.

"And are you vexed?" he asked.

"Why should I be?" she replied quietly, but her eyes avoided his. "I am going into the reading-room to get a book," and she turned away from him and crossed the hall to the reading-room with an air that clearly intimated that she did not wish him to follow her.

He watched her out of his sight, with darts of mingled feelings tingling in his breast.

To look into her deep grey eyes, hear her low clear voice, touch her hand once more, sent a thrill of joy to his heart; but to realize that as wide a gulf separated them as if the Atlantic still rolled between them, was a fresh sting of the old pain. He was half wounded, half angry at her chilling reticence, and yet he was

the more in love with her for that passionless inaccessibility which seemed to set her on tranquil heights apart from and above him.

During the ensuing days he realized, with a corroding sense of disappointment, that to live under the same roof with her was not necessarily to have any opportunity of confidential conversation with her. He could not certainly, in strict accuracy, be said to be living under the same roof, as the Fitzallans lodged in the West Pavilion; but practically it came to the same thing; they were parts of the same circle, the same household. He might see her at any hour, "all day long and every day;" and yet somehow he could never see her *tête-à-tête*. She did not betray any apparent avoidance of him; she answered him pleasantly, smiled with that cool, dreamy, moonlight sweetness of hers when he spoke to her; but she managed, with feminine *finesse*, that he should never find her alone.

He, as of old, took every opportunity of being near her; but even more cautiously than of old, sensitively careful for her sake, avoided any appearance of special attention. Only now and then it chanced that their eyes would meet, and something in his glance would recall the unforgotten hours of the past to her, and then *her* eyes would sink or turn aside. And only in these brief moments, when he caught that wavering in her glance, and perhaps the faintest flickering of the delicate colour on her cheeks—could Ray thoroughly realize that their memorable ocean voyage *had been!* It was a plain fact of the recent past, and not a mere wild dream. Between himself and this woman, so stately and serene, so proud and pure and cold, whose very hand he scarcely dared to touch, there was the link of a secret—a secret they two alone in the world shared between them—a secret which, were it now revealed, would be compromising to her good name. Yet she trusted him; he knew without a word or a sign how implicitly she trusted and relied on his loyalty. And if at times he almost hated her for her coldness, at others he fairly adored her for her faith—the fearless confidence that scorned to stoop to soft words, and dared to hold him aloof from her with this steadfast and unyielding *sang-froid*.

(To be continued.)

FROM A CHÂTEAU IN ANJOU.

By THE HON. MRS. HENRY CHETWYND,

AUTHOR OF "SARA," "A MARCH VIOLET," ETC.

WHIRLING slowly enough from Dieppe to Paris, viâ Rouen—a day or two there to revive one's recollections of St. Ouen and the Cathedral—past Paris and its exquisite Bois de Boulogne, feeling the depression caused by a sense of the departed glory of the town, the vacant spaces and the diminished attraction of its shop windows—on across ugly, sunny, fertile France, with the occasional glimpses of beauty afforded by the Central line (where it passes through the bit of Brittany near Sablé) to Anjou, with its lovely sweeping valleys, its wonderful vegetation, its vineyards, and the Loire, which is our present goal.

We are on a visit to French friends, long looked forward to, and it is real happiness to find that between expectation and fulfilment there is not that wide disparity that too often obtains in this criss-cross world.

The weather, to begin with, is absolutely perfect for people who have not anything particular to do. Even an Englishman "*avec le spleen*" (who has a digestion, or an indigestion, of a peculiar and obscure kind, and who has it always in his remembrance) can only say, "It is fine, very fine"—true, he is sure it is going to be much too hot, and he does not believe it will last. Who cares? When sleep comes, with windows thrown wide open to "night and her thousand eyes;" when the morning brings purest floods of sunshine, and the combined fragrance of shrubs and flowers, hot-houses and conservatories have made us acquainted with in a limited fashion at home—plants that here clamber over the walls in luxuriant quantities—the present is ours! The single gardenia, or Cape jessamine, is in itself a joy, so waxen and lovely to look at, and with the gardenia perfume it is so like our own starry flowers, only more waxen and much larger. All tuberoses, auratums, and other lilies are so delicious in the open-air; with these are the more homely flowers. Honeysuckle, roses, and orange-blossom give out their scent, and in point of beauty what can vie with the wonderful hue of the pomegranate flowers, clustering up the wall, with the lovely polished dark green leaves to set off and enhance their beauty?

It is indeed the garden of France, and the very paradise of flowers.

The château, standing on a terrace, and looking down upon the Loire, is an imposing looking house, but not really very large—not too large for comfort. It does not vie in point of size with our big country houses in England, so that all its rooms are inhabited and nothing is left to the tender mercies of neglect.

There is a high-pitched roof, which is very picturesque, and the place is cared for down to the minutest detail. But there is no very great extent; the whole property would be easily contained in a small park, and for this very reason every bit of it is made the most of.

There is a combined French and English element, and a most complete liberty and freedom, less conventionality, and an ease which the heat, the mode of life engenders.

There is nothing particular for the visitors to do, and they have no inclination to do anything. The hammocks are in requisition—books, papers, arguments, a stroll. *Dolce far niente* is an acceptable change to men who work hard as a rule, and justifiable idleness in this weather is real enjoyment.

The leaven of English life creates more order than would be the case in a purely French house, especially *en province*, where the French families resign themselves to imperfect service, and an amount of slovenliness and dirt which would make any English person very thoroughly uncomfortable.

From the house and terrace the view is very fair and lovely—the valley of the Loire, with the river showing itself coyly, like a beauty chary of her looks, and the Vendéean hills on the horizon, a faint blue line that brings a thrill of recollection and interest.

It is a beautiful spot. A backwater of the Loire flows through the grounds, and another tributary divides the place from the Island of Béhuard. The church, called Notre Dame de Béhuard, stands on a rock in the centre of the island, and is a spot very full of interest—and the object of many pilgrimages—dating from the days of Louis XI.

A few fine trees, spared by good taste, are in the grounds, but, except the few generally grouped near a dwelling-house or château, the utilitarian spirit of the age cuts down all timber to within a few feet of the ground, and thus deprives the roads of shade and the country of beauty, except at a distance.

Never was a more complete case of distance lending enchantment. From afar the country looks richly wooded; when near, the banks and woods are found to be green only with the growth of one year or so. Short stumps, with luxuriant young branches, give the effect of richness to the landscape, and are only the melancholy remains of once fine trees, not only lopped, but cut to within three or four feet of the ground.

Money is everywhere scarce, and wood sells well, and so the trees are sacrificed.

Our hosts are exceptions to many purely French rules. Their

place is exceptional also. But it is quite curious to pay a round of visits, and notice the great difference existing between French families here and the same people in Paris. The truth is that they almost all come to the country to economize; the liveried lackeys of the Rue St. Honoré and the Boulevard Malesherbes are replaced here by a lout in a blouse. No visitors seem to be expected; there is hardly ever a front-door bell, and it is the funniest thing in the world to drive to a château, imposing from its size, and get out of the carriage, open the front door and stand in the hall, and shout any name that occurs to you—Jean, Pierre, Paul, Louis, or Babette, often for a considerable time.

Finally, some one appears, and you hear that Madame la Marquise or Madame la Comtesse is upstairs or in the garden, or somewhere near.

The doors of the salon are thrown open, and you find yourself in a large room singularly in contrast with the bare little hall, which is almost invariably paved with well-worn red bricks and guiltless of any sort of decoration. In the salon the inlaid parquet is generally beautifully kept; there are sometimes lovely old tapestries and fine wood carving, occasionally a few good pictures.

On either side of the stove or chimney stand six arm-chairs in a row, a round table in the middle of the room, without a sign of occupation; the rooms are stiff, cold, and bare to our ideas. You feel conversation must be conventional seated on those chairs, and it *is* conventional.

The lady of the house arrives, in the very shabbiest clothes, but with the finest and most charming manners, and the conversation in one house is almost a *facsimile* of what it is in every other, deprecating remarks about their own houses, views, and advantages; and immense admiration for the place you come from, with a subtle under current of envy for the wealth that keeps it up, never protruded but occasionally betrayed.

The contrast is striking, for with hardly any exception, the prominent evidences of neglect form a most depressing influence—the long avenues so ill-kept, overgrown with grass and weeds, the palings broken down, even in some cases the gates fastened together with rough ropes, and weighted and propped up with stones. Above all, the never-failing sunshine, around us delicious air.

But for the sunshine how dreary those country places would be!

One of the more distant excursions took us to one of the most famous châteaux in this part of the country—the Château de Serrand. It is a huge pile of building with a courtyard, a moat, pleasure grounds, and an "English" park; these last both of moderate dimensions. The moat around it is very wide. The castle has the interest attaching to it of being the place where Prince Charlie slept and started from on the occasion of his last ill-fated journey to Scotland. His picture hangs in the bedroom

he occupied, and the bedroom and furniture are all exactly as he left them.

It is a very interesting old place, with a wide stone staircase reminding us of old Scotch castles; indeed, many of the square, solid-looking châteaux remind us of those at home, and are equally guiltless of being castellated.

The Château de Serrand, with its heavy, massive towers, is a really fine old place, and the wide stone passages give a great idea of space and solidity.

Unfortunately, the usual extraordinary disregard of sanitary arrangements which is the prevailing drawback of all purely French houses has allowed *all* the drainage of the house to flow into the moat, and the consequences are the reverse of pleasant! Indeed, it is difficult to believe one's own eyes at times, some of the arrangements of these old places are so absolutely wonderful to our ideas.

In one of the very wide passages leading to the kitchen, *and within a few yards of the kitchen door*, we noticed spaces built up at intervals, the closing up evidently of recent date.

These actually held the coffins of some of the ancestors—the bodies were only removed a few years ago. The vaults not being large enough to hold the family, these places were made. In former days, and at that time, no one thought it extraordinary.

The great drawback here to English eyes, in almost all the country places, is the want of good turf; the grass is so coarse and *unkempt*-looking. Our maligned climate, with its greater moisture and heavy dew, produces such lovely velvety grass, everywhere here one misses it.

In Paris, by dint of perpetual watering, it is good, but in very few other parts of France. Here, in their lovely abode, the flowers are superb and the grass nowhere. The gardeners do nothing but water all day long, to keep the flowers and the fruit trees from drooping.

The hours of labour are long, and the pay averages two and a half francs a day, but the people not only work very slowly, but require incessant "hunting up."

It would never occur to the head gardener here to tie up a branch, remove a dead plant, do anything without direction. All day long you hear occasional shouts, "Théophile! remove that fallen branch, nail up that creeper, water this plant." Théophile obeys, moving with a slowness which is exasperating to one not accustomed to it. The hours of labour are from five a.m. till eight, from nine to eleven, from one to four and six to eight. Every one does exactly what he is told, no more, and takes a very long time to walk from one spot to another.

It is to be supposed that their wooden sabots have something to recommend them, but they are not cheap; they split easily and are worn out in about a month; they are light but extremely

clumsy, and one pair of strong leather shoes will see three or four pair of sabots out.

The felt stocking worn inside the sabots is warm but does not last either. Perhaps on the rough roads the sabots give more protection to the feet than leather shoes, but the peasants don't think so. The only reason they give for wearing them is that it is the custom, and they would be glad if it were not so.

The Anjou women's caps are picturesque and rational; they are those caps flat over the forehead with the lace sticking out like wings on either side—the forehead is in this way protected from the sun and the lace "wings" act as a curtain and allow the air to play about the head.

Each district has a modification of these caps, but the shape here is about the prettiest. We went to church on a fête day. It is a remarkably pretty church as regards the interior, and the quantity of women in these snow-white caps made quite a striking picture. One part of the church is assigned to mourners. Besides a black gown and the usual cap, a large transparent black veil is thrown completely over the figure and has a singularly graceful air. The mourning is the same for parents, husbands, or children.

The same desire to do away with a distinctive dress, which is destroying national costume everywhere else, causes the younger women to adopt tawdry and unbecoming bonnets, just as in some parts of Holland one's feelings are shocked by seeing lovely old lace caps with their beautiful lappets surmounted by frivolous French bonnets loaded with artificial flowers.

Driving through the villages there is so much to remind one of being in another country. The tumble-down look of even an imposing house, stone walls bereft of coping and covered with vines; in the doorways old and young women spinning with a distaff, everywhere brilliant sunshine, colour and—dirt. The dirt inside the cottages is something to be remembered. They have less sense of refinement than any people we have ever met, except in certain—not all—parts of Germany. They prepare their threshing floor near the manure heap, mixing manure and sand with water; this hardens and all the corn is threshed out there with flails possessing very short handles and very long arms, but the unsavoury odour is not diminished in the process.

It seems so strange that with so warm a climate water should be held in such light esteem. The upper classes in France take a bath, of course, frequently, but it is always talked of as a function, and a good rest is taken after it. The lower orders live their lives without it. A French friend told us of being summoned in Brittany to see a child in convulsions. She advised a warm bath and was refused with indignation. "Thank God," said the mother, "none of my children have ever touched water, and never shall."

"But, my good woman, how do you wash their faces?"

"*Dame! je prends mon tablier.*"

One reason for this horror of washing their little ones is at first the fear of washing off the sacred oil with which at baptism the heads are anointed, and to which they cling superstitiously, but there exists besides this among the poorer peasantry a distinct dread of water, which they seem to consider in the light of a natural enemy.

The Island of Béhuard, previously mentioned, is one of the most picturesque possible places. It is celebrated for a church built upon a rock (said to be the site of an old pagan temple), the church being the object of devout pilgrimages to this day, and containing many relics.

It owes its relics and prestige in a great degree to Louis XI., who, when conscience-stricken by the recollection of his many cruelties, tried to buy the pardon of Heaven by lavishly endowing churches and religious communities. Putting various fabulous traditions upon one side, the history of the place dates back to Geoffrey Martel, Comte of Anjou, who succeeded his father, Foulques Nerra, in 1040.

This warlike prince gave two or three small islands in the Loire to the Chevalier Bubuardus, who retreated to one of them in his old age, and left this island as a legacy to certain monks of Angers.

A constant struggle for power went on for a long time between the nobles on the adjacent lands and the possessors of the island. In 1442 the Dauphin of France, afterwards Louis XI., son of Charles VII., being nearly drowned in the neighbourhood, and praying fervently to Notre Dame de Béhuard, found land and safety under his feet, and though his gratitude lay dormant, he found it wise to remember it after long and weary years, when oppression and cruelties had brought the unhappy people to revolt. He paid the island many visits, enriched the church—though we are reminded by M. Armand Parrot, who is its most recent historian, that this sly and watchful sovereign generally put his politics and his piety amicably side by side, and that his pilgrimages were generally made to churches in the centre of rich provinces, where he particularly wished to spy and find out all that was going on.

When he died he was meditating making the little church into an important religious centre, and indeed the various necessary papers were signed by him, but the Pope's consent never arrived, and though Louis had rebuilt and beautified the little church, the project of its aggrandizement dropped to the ground when he breathed his last.

But as it exists now, it is one of the most interesting small churches to be found anywhere. As the island is under water to a great extent in winter and spring, all the houses have outside ladders to enable the inhabitants to escape to their upper chambers during the floods; and the church is perched high on the rock, and is reached by many stone steps, which gives it quite an original

appearance, and it stands out beautifully from the foliage of the trees beneath it.

The rock upon which it is built forms three of its sides, and is roughly hewn inside, tradition says much spoiled by an attempt to level the walls ; but as it is, there is a look of real antiquity, which carries one back to very old days.

It is, of course, full of votive offerings—waxen babies, legs and arms, crutches, every imaginable symbol of restored health. There is an inscription in old French setting forth the pious sentiments and intentions of Charles VIII. (the son of Louis XI.), but among various curious pictures, the most remarkable is the picture of Louis, presented by himself to the church, and which has hung where it was then placed ever since.

It is *en profile*, and painted on wood. The cruel and crafty eye and weak chin make one feel that the likeness must be a good one.

We had a most amusing instance of the way history is sometimes made. As we were leaving the church one day, a very intelligent-looking, brown-eyed woman, nursing her baby, and waiting with her husband's dinner at the little ferry, began to talk about the church. Speaking of the chains and irons which were worn by Christians in Algeria, and which hang in a conspicuous place in the body of the church, she asked us if we had noticed them, and added, "They are the very irons worn by the sainted king in his captivity. It was those chains that made him so pious and good to Notre Dame de Béhuard."

Like all land well-watered by a river at certain seasons, with the rich deposit left at its retreat, the island is extremely fertile, and the flax, hemp, &c., which is now being cut, is of the best, and the small peasant proprietors here are far better off than in many places. A steamer runs past the island every day when practicable, and a good market is to be found either at Nantes or Angers. But the chief reason of prosperity is the work to be had in the neighbourhood on the other side of the river ; in short, the presence of capital, which, following the universal law of absorption, is gradually acquiring the land.

Notre Dame de Béhuard must be a pretty and interesting sight at the time of the great pilgrimage. Her statue was disappointing when we saw it ; it was substituted by the king for the "Lady of Béhuard," already existing, and this one holds a sceptre with a *fleur-de-lys* in her hand.

The principal relics in the church are—a bit of the field bought with the thirty pieces of silver for which Our Saviour was betrayed, some of the bones of the eleven thousand virgins, and several silver statuettes.

The windows are ancient, and represent certain nobles, mixed up with sacred subjects, in the fashion of those times. Besides being a place of pilgrimage, it is the favourite resort in the country

on Sundays, and when the place is under water fifty boats will sometimes surround the church steps, the great object of all being to be as nearly last as possible without being disgracefully late, because fifty river boats, all flat-bottomed and clumsy, make it nearly impossible for the first-comers not to be long detained. The exit must be as difficult as that from Arlington Street after a great political "at home."

The most primitive arrangements still obtain in the neighbourhood. The bakers still use a tally-stick for each house, cutting a notch for each loaf of bread delivered, and the long brown loaves are tempting-looking, though slightly sour to taste.

CHAPTER II.

LIFE here is very pleasant!

At mid-day it is too hot to do anything requiring energy, but we remain conscious of enjoyment, which is the happiest possible frame of mind. The stillness is so great that only a few of the aspen leaves quiver. The whole world seems to be asleep, and probably is so, the very bees leaving off humming at last; and after a few hours of this intense quiet every one rouses up. Boating and driving is the order of the day; no French people ever walk if they can avoid it. In the country there are many visits to pay and return, none of the properties being large enough to keep the neighbours many miles apart; indeed, to our English ideas the imposing houses are immensely too large for the properties they stand on. There is, for instance, here not a single farm; the place is all cultivated from the house, the vineyard labourers (the *vignerons*) being the only tenants in the cottages.

The whole property is inclosed upon one side by a wall facing the south, which is planted with fruit trees; then the vineyards lie on the slopes, and in this climate, with little rain and no dew, everything depends upon the watering, which goes on from morning till night.

The pears are *quite* magnificent, every possible variety being represented. We are told that there are twelve hundred pear trees on this wall. The most ancient bit of the garden has box hedges 14 feet high, affording a perpetual shady walk in the hot days.

About two miles from us live a very amusing couple; the man, a *nouveau riche*; his wife of a good but impoverished family. His small château is prettily situated in a park of moderate dimensions, "an English park" he calls it.

His house is full of beautiful, curious and incongruous things, and he spends his life in admiring his possessions, with his fat little hands in his pockets, or patting his chest from the vantage armhole of his waistcoat. Nothing gives him more pleasure than

the advent of some one to admire everything, and admiration it is impossible not to give honestly to each separate thing.

Tapestries from Holland, with the history of how he heard of them, pursued and bought them, the price he paid, and the dangers of their journey; Italian inlaid chairs, *with* a history; carved cabinets, ditto; plush covers on wide, old-fashioned sofas; polished inlaid floors; chimney-pieces bought out of one old house, pictures from another, and the hall, as usual, paved with rough red bricks, which cause the beautiful floors of the rooms to come upon one with a great surprise.

He spoke much of his latest addition, his library—such a pretty, odd-shaped room, with many possibilities. But it was lined with empty bookshelves; down to the wainscoting mahogany, heavy, hideous and Gothic; from there to the floor, Renaissance.

It was impossible not to smile.

"I see, madame's eye is attracted to my book-shelves," he said blandly.

I murmured something about two styles.

"Madame," he said, caressing his chest with his fat little fingers, "I intend the literature to be also of the two periods—above only Gothic, below Renaissance. You find the idea good? It is entirely my own."

In the very large dining-room was a most exquisitely-carved oak chimney-piece. In the centre of the room, looking strangely out of keeping with the surrounding magnificence, was a small table, with a *service à deux*; the coarsest table-cloth, and the commonest knives and forks; the heavy, thick, unbreakable china, seen in some restaurants, and tumblers of the thickest and commonest glass, all put on the table anyhow.

The man-servant, hot from the stable, and his inevitable blouse showing signs of his work there, stood at the door as we drove away, bowing respectfully, and looked curiously out of place. It is the constant sense of incongruity that strikes one so much.

One charming neighbour, handsome and with high-bred and most courteous manners, came to receive us in a rusty, worn, alpaca gown, bearing signs of many encounters with greasy substances. Her scanty grey hair was tightly pulled up to the top of her head in a little knob, a battered straw hat (which she took off), hands with those exaggerated, pointed and polished nails which remind one forcibly of the prehensile claws of a bird of prey, and on this occasion dirty beyond expression; magnificent diamond rings, a charming smile, and a blue cotton apron tied tightly round her waist, or rather where her waist once was; her figure left entirely free from any restraints, and suggestive of a feather bed with a string round it. But no one could think of her appearance once she began to talk—witty, polite, spirited, she drew every one out,

and the way she spoke, her vivacity, her grace, the charm of her smile, the very action of her dirty hands, filled one with an admiration which outweighed the neglect of her toilette in a way difficult to realize, unless personally experienced. To our ideas the every day lives of French ladies *en province* are dull and much wanting in interest. Chocolate or coffee in bed, and the early luncheon, or *déjeuner*, partaken of in a *déshabille*, utterly regardless of appearances; lounging and a novel till dressing for the drive or dinner, and then cards or conversation. With some few exceptions, their "tenantry" consist of a few *vignerons*, the properties are so small in this part of France, with few exceptions. The very small peasant properties create a multitude of money-lenders; the people are well off only when work is to be had in the neighbourhood, and the sub-division of landed property has diminished the power and wealth of the old families, and accounts for the shabby look of the grounds round the country houses. To enjoy life in the country certain funds must be at hand, for to live isolated from your kith and kin makes life dull enough. Charity there is in plenty, but it is generally by proxy, and that personal sympathy which does good to the giver is very often absent. There is not, of course, that great interest in the poor which exists in England in country places, where the poor live on the property of some one, and it struck us always in talking to the poor people that they neither liked nor respected the proprietors of the various châteaux, who were not their landlords.

These proprietors do not live in the country; they live in Paris and spend there; they vegetate in the country, and economize there. Besides other causes, French ladies are, as a race, a Sybarite class; they hate exertion, cold, or discomfort of any kind, and it is quite remarkable to hear them talk, when you get to know them well, about motherhood, or any of humanity's trials. They are devoted mothers, and have happy homes; but from babyhood, the trouble is always shifted to other shoulders, as regards their children; and seeing them seldom, they indulge them much. To see a French child at meals is often to see something one would rather not have seen.

The Loire at this season of the year is of very uncertain depth. There is of course plenty of water in the Maine, and at the junction of the two rivers it all widens into a splendid stream; but occasionally, while sailing along deliciously, as we do in the pleasant evenings, we have delightful adventures which, as we have not got the fatal possession of "nerves," add considerably to the charm of our excursions.

Sometimes we go out early, before the great heat of the day comes on, taking lunch with us, making no definite plan about landing; all is delightfully vague and dependent on circumstances. It is the absolute freedom of action which makes life so desirable a thing here. No one is tied to return at a fixed hour. In this

great neat part of every meal is cold, if not iced. Those who remain at home can sit down and enjoy their dinner without remorse at a conventional hour; but absence on the part of the others causes no anxiety and no surprise. When the wanderers finally arrive something is ready in this hospitable house, and the supply of fruit is absolutely unlimited. It is too early for the big pears, but the small peaches—about half the size of our hot-house peaches—figs and other fruit are in their prime, and appear in greatest profusion at breakfast, luncheon and dinner. There is the same difference between these peaches and ours grown under glass, that there is between the open-air grapes here and our hot-house grapes. All tastes are not alike, and we prefer our own as far as regards flavour; but here they are eaten when the heat makes cool fruit delicious, and so acceptable that we feel monsters of ingratitude for drawing the comparison. Among the many ice machines with which from time to time enterprising inventors make us acquainted surely none has ever been made so simple, so inexpensive, so primitive, and so successful as the one here, where ice is a necessity more than a luxury, and where a big block of ice is turned out in half-an-hour. A handful of fire, clear water brought beyond boiling point, a hermetically sealed vessel (containing chemicals), which has lasted for years, is all that is necessary.

Of course wine, and very good wine, is made here, but the process and the vintage has been too often described to be necessary here.

The process of vinegar making is much like that common to the Highlands (and especially the West Highlands) of Scotland. A vinegar plant (here called a fungus) is put into a cask and the best wine added. The fungus is carefully cut from time to time, otherwise its growth would soon fill the cask. In Scotland, water is used, and the flavour is of course quite different, though refreshing enough. Either from the goodness and purity of the wine, or special care, the vinegar here is remarkably good, and is one reason the salads are so wonderfully delicate.

The one universal topic just now is of course the dreaded phylloxera; perpetual rumours of its approach, contradictions of the same, an infallible cure and its failure, fill the papers and the thoughts of men. Politics are not always safe to touch upon and are better avoided. Every one agrees only on one point—the country is rapidly going to the dogs, and the only apparent difference is how far off the catastrophe is in reality. Every one abuses the system or want of system, commerce is nowhere, taxation is frightful; but no one seems particularly to mind. We listen as in a dream to utterances which appear merely translations of what is said every day at home.

Every nation, save perhaps the “dominant Teutonic,” likes to abuse its institutions, while quarreling with any outsider who may

follow suit. We all put on a good deal of that pride that apes humility, until some one else agrees with us, and then——. Sanguine people and depressed people exist everywhere, and as regards the phylloxera, so much is written and talked about it, that it appears absolutely wonderful a vine is left in the country or a bottle of wine made. At home, do not agriculturists often cry out about sunshine or rain in the same way, and but that one sees waving fields of corn everywhere, we might suppose a famine was impending.

Some French officers and their wives come to dinner from time to time, and sundry neighbours. The officers are always very professional men, more so than in England; they are very well bred (much more refined than in Germany), never say one word to wound our susceptibilities, but talk of war and manœuvres and generalship *con amore* all the time of dinner.

After dinner, always some of the party sing, while the others saunter on the terrace.

Exquisite as the place is in broad daylight, it is a very paradise at night. The air is full of the breath of those wonderful flowers, the stars shine brightly overhead, there is no dew; the landscape, softened and mysterious, is accentuated here and there by the lights in unshuttered windows; the river runs on with its everlasting song, and as the music comes to us, now gay and bright, now soft and melancholy, we have that consciousness of perfect happiness which is the acme of enjoyment.

Sometimes the music changes to a valse, and light feet whirl round on the polished parquet floor; the furniture is wheeled on one side in a moment, and the impromptu dance, with all the charm of informality, is as merry and cheerful as only an impromptu ball can be. With the same absolute freedom of action which obtains in other things, any of the elder members can slip away and go to bed without a formal good-night. All you are asked to do, indeed, in this delightful place is to enjoy yourself in your own way.

One lovely morning a "soldier's breeze" tempts us to go up the river a longer way than usual.

The "boatmen" were told off, luncheon was ordered, and away we went.

An experienced member of the party, who went down one of the first, remarks that the sails looked odd. He hesitated to speak, because as so many things in France are done in a manner diametrically opposed to our way, he was not sure whether the way of setting the sails upside down was not perhaps the French way. But on pointing out this peculiar rig it proved to be a slight mistake, one which the boatmen thought mattered so little as to be surprised at being made to change it.

Finally we sailed gaily along, taking a sandbank now and again and being pushed off again by the active young men of the party who

had Nile-boat experiences and who enjoyed being amphibious, as indeed we all felt we should in an equal degree (had it only been possible), as the day grew hotter and hotter.

The breeze filled our sails, and we were all perfectly happy. We landed on a lovely island to lunch, and then went on. A guitar and several voices sounded very well on the water, and every one developed a voice and did their best.

By-and-by the flapping of the sails told their own tale—the breeze had gone, and the most artful steering could not cause them to puff out any more; they hung idly down as though ashamed of themselves.

But tea must be had, and we once more landed, uttering those fallacies about a breeze springing up when the twilight came on, which in France is so complete a fallacy.

But we were in excellent spirits and enjoyed our tea, put about, and prepared to go home. The darkness fell upon us very suddenly, as it always does in that part of the world, and it grew intensely dark; even the stars were chary of appearing that night, and we had no lights.

Driving along a dangerous road at night, overtaken by the darkness and without lamps, is unpleasant; but a still more helpless feeling comes over one in a boat. Every now and again we bumped against the bank, and were fast on a sandbank at another; and we soon discovered that we had missed the right turn and had gone round the back of a long island, where the water was deeper, but where there was a "cataract" in the shape of a nearly perpendicular rock quite six feet high.

Eventually, and hardly realizing our danger, we were hurried over this with a feeling reminding us of the first really formidable jump out hunting. We sat still, held our breath, and clutched whatever was nearest us. Then, the danger over, we laughed at our unacknowledged fears. Punting with longer poles than we use in England, we push along; fatigued we most of us were, but very good humour prevailed and made everything easy and pleasant; the younger men more amphibious than ever, sometimes swimming, sometimes wading, and when they had any breath to spare breaking into song.

It was very late when we got home, and we had a merry supper and dispersed to our rooms, as usual, feeling the great difficulty of this place—it seemed so sad to go to bed, and yet the exquisite mornings tempt us up so early. It is difficult to go to sleep, the evenings are so heavenly—and yet we grudge sleeping in the morning, when all is a dream of delight.

All sorts of unconventional things are done; some of the party drive at 5 A.M. a long way to a little inn and a mountain. They reappear at twelve full of their excursion and their somewhat primitive breakfast. Sometimes we have tea in the wood—each day shows us a shrub or a tree or a flower we have not noticed

before. The sugar-canes, with their lance-like leaves, grow luxuriantly here, and indeed, what does not?

From the outer world comes news in various interesting ways. A young naval officer arrives home from Tonquin to rejoice the heart of his mother, who is a neighbour. He gives a graphic description of the position of affairs and speaks with a pleasant grain of criticism kept well within bounds, and mentions his own deeds little, with becoming modesty, though we know he has distinguished himself on several occasions, and is decorated.

An amusing person called with her daughter, coming from a great distance, a little to the surprise of our charming hostess. Her object was soon explained. Turning to me she said naïvely:

"Will you be so good as to speak English with my daughter, madame? She once had an English governess."

The poor girl reddened. I asked her in English if she was fond of exercise—if she walked or rode.

"I will tell you, madame, I do not love moving. I like quiet sitting down."

"Do you ever see the harriers go out, mademoiselle?"

"I will tell you, madame, that between my brother and M. de — there is a 'pike,' so I never look at them."

I was a little nonplussed, and she said rapidly in French, "they had a dispute."

"Oh!" I said, "you mean there is a 'pique' between them."

"Yes, madame."

"Now continue speaking English," cried her mother. "You find her accent good? Go on talking, my daughter; say something more in English!"

Under this pressure the poor girl was dumb. I felt for her; it was so like that famous play of Molière's! I tried another subject, that of English literature.

"I will tell you, madame," she said with the same formula, "that there are no books fit for me to read in English." This with a charming smile.

"Indeed!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, madame; there are no Catholic books or papers, only *The Lamp* and a few other papers."

"Ah!" I answered, beginning to understand. Satisfied with the conversation and the length of her visit, the mamma now swept away her daughter, much to her relief.

One of our most amusing visits was one to the Juge de Paix. Every one who knows France at all knows the enormous importance of any official down to the very smallest member of official life.

An impostor had been going round the country collecting subscriptions for an orphanage existing in his own imagination only.

When he was arrested, a paper was found upon him with the

names carefully inscribed of every proprietor of the district, including our host. He was therefore requested, in legal and imposing terms, to go to this town, many miles away, and confront the scamp. Now, owing to an accident he was lame, and a long drive prohibited by the doctor. So his wife drove over, and very kindly took me with her. We had a most charming drive. Clouds tempered the sun's rays, as a storm was brewing in the distance, and the motion was pleasant to us both, through the soft air.

We arrived in the market place of a very quaint town, possessing that air of departed grandeur which seems the universal rule here. Some large houses ticketed *à louer présentement*, some *entre cour et jardin*, with old iron gates falling to pieces and tied together with rope, lopped trees here and there, exquisite creepers, orange, crimson, and purple, hanging in festoons from every available place; neglected vines showing green garlands; all round was a luxury of vegetation, splendid colour and—decay. Moving in front of this glowing background were the white-capped women—now and again a vividly-coloured handkerchief, enhancing a picture which was unlike most pictures in its mixture of human life and its framework of decadence. Men, women and children came out to see the rare sight of a carriage clattering along the empty streets and attended by the cracking of our coachman's whip—he was a most accomplished performer.

After some inquiry we found the house of the Juge de Paix—a modest, white-washed house with green blinds and a green door. We were shown into a very small room with a painted floor, a writing-table and a few chairs the whole furniture; and on the walls printed notices. In one corner, suggestively covered by the dust of ages, legal books in paper covers.

Monsieur le Juge de Paix was a little, bald, corpulent man with an amusingly contradictory expression struggling in his face. By nature he was evidently jovial; he had a merry eye and a pronounced dimple on his cheek. His disposition was evidently mirth-loving, and a smile broke through all restraints every now and again. But he did his best to be dignified; he wanted to be the Government official, a republican, and quite at his ease. But he was oppressed by the rank and distinction of his French visitor. For many minutes we did nothing but interchange bows; then with all the vivacity and fluency of her race Madame — opened fire upon him. She began by saying no one respected the law as she and her husband did; then she said there was no chance of monsieur's going into court as he was lame; that he would be of no use if he did go as he knew nothing of the depraved individual in question; that she could not but admire the celerity with which the law had begun to vindicate itself, and overwhelmed the little man with compliments, assuring him of the high respect in which they held him, &c., &c., &c.

When quite out of breath, madame paused and he began; with

equal rapidity he explained his action and his side of the question, justified himself, quoted legal authorities, and left me much in doubt if the excuse for the gentleman's non-appearance was going to be accepted.

After showing off his knowledge and quoting further legal precedents, *ad infinitum*, he then changed his tone, and said : though right was on his side, when a lady of her consideration was in the question he would waive his rights and the rights of the law. It was complimentary if a little confused in expression.

She thanked him negligently, as one quite accustomed to set the law on one side to suit her convenience ; he got more fervent and more impassioned.

Then a word or two was said on other matters, and we admired a lovely tree in the garden behind his house. He beamed ; he had brought it a seedling from Africa, and cherished it always ; now he would cherish it with redoubled zeal since we admired it.

He reminded me of a poor French lieutenant many years ago in Paris, who showed my young sister and myself down a steep, dark staircase ; he had but one arm and was forced to leave one of us occasionally in darkness, as he could hold but the one light.


"Mesdemoiselles," he said fevently, "it is only now for the first time I regret the loss of my arm !"

M. le Juge de Paix was chained to his door-step by etiquette, but bowed till we could no longer see him.

After all, on our return we found that the impostor had received a subscription—the *maître d'hôtel* had given him ten or twenty francs. Madame's face was rather a study when she heard this.

The days, alas ! have flown, and our delightful visit ends. The scent of the flowers, the vivid sunshine, the never-ending charm of the life here is over. The memory of so much kindness alone remains.

But these resting-places in life are too well impressed upon the mind ever to be forgotten, and brighten all our days, too thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated ever to fade away !



FATHER DAMIAN.

TRUE son of faith, born in a faithless time,
God's angel 'mongst the outcast lepers sent
A living martyr, joyful to be spent,
All through the flush and vigour of thy prime,
Among lost wretches, festering in the slime
Of living flesh by death's foul fingers rent—
To light dim eyes towards hope's bright orient,
Eternity's mysterious dawn sublime.
Hast thou not proved some spark of quenchless fire
Burns in each breast dissolved by mortal pain,
The unconquerable need, the strong desire,
Of buried passion that shall spring again?
Thy trust is sure—nor earth, nor heaven in man,
Honours a nobler name than Damian.

EMILIA AYLMER GOWING.

I R A .

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MISS MOLLY."

"The time is great.
(What times are little?) To the sentinel
That hour is regal when he mounts on guard."

THERE is a certain charm about the unexpected which helps us over many rough places in life. If things are not quite as we would have them to-day, some turn of fortune's wheel may dower us more fortunately to-morrow. It did not come to-day, that for which our heart craved—and yesterday also we drew a blank—but to-morrow still lies shrouded in mystery.

This compensating gift to lower mortals is not, however, meted out to the dwellers in courts, or, if so, it is in a very minor degree. The future is foreseen as far as is possible to weak human eyesight, and then is guarded against, or prepared for, as seems most suitable. But from such preparations the charm of surprise must necessarily be absent. In such case it is rare *que l'imprévu arrive*. Maybe when it does the thrill it causes is all the more pleasurable. But the rigorous etiquette that hedges in a throne, even though it be of the smallest, is of necessity in a degree relaxed when absence from court and court routine renders it difficult to retain.

Rising early to drink waters, where kings and queens even only form part of a decorous German crowd, hinders much outward attempt at display, and in this Prince and Princess issuing from the rooms in the "Golden Lion," which had been reserved for them, there was little to attract attention. They were no longer youthful, and there was little to distinguish them from hundreds of others, excepting the obsequious *chasseur*, the gentleman and lady in waiting, ready to take their places in the barouche drawn up opposite the house, the barouche that was the best the "Golden Lion" had to offer.

Still, there is an irresistible attraction about royalty, a fascination that attends their most ordinary movements; and the comers and goers on their way to and from the early dinner paused in the brilliant mid-day sunshine to watch the start.

The door was thrown open, the pair were seen descending the steps—a tall, serious-looking man, with iron-grey whiskers and moustache, and a sad-eyed woman leaning on his arm. Only half a dozen paces and they had reached the narrow side-walk close to which waited the carriage. The lady dropped her husband's arm

and took a step forward, when of a sudden, through the small decorous crowd of bystanders passed a thrill, and little ejaculations, which seemed the outcome of some unexpected occurrence in their midst, and then of a sudden, in the small centre space where stood the Prince and Princess, appeared a tiny dark-eyed child. She looked around, fear and doubt on her face; looked with a swift, terrified glance from the circle of strange faces towards those by whom she stood, then, as a bystander stretched out his hand with the intention of drawing her back, she broke from him with a cry and clung to the Princess.

"Mother, mother! I have lost her!"

In all the years he had been at the court, such an unprecedented event had never occurred. For a moment Count von Waldenberg was really unable to decide what ought to be done.

"Ah! thank heaven, here was a policeman and Fräulein von Etzen. Of course she was the person."

He took from her hand the light shawl she carried, so as to render her more free to cope with so much unruliness. And all the time the small cause of the disturbance was clinging to the gown she had seized in her despair, and was pouring forth quick, passionate words, partly in German and partly in English.

But it only required that moment's hesitation for Count Waldenberg to collect his scattered wits and to meet even such an unexpected difficulty with his accustomed clearheadedness.

"If Your Highness," and he stepped forward bowing, "will permit, Fräulein von Etzen will give the child into the care of the landlord, who, it seems, knows her mother."

He stooped as he spoke, and strove to loosen the clasp of the little hands. But they only closed the more firmly.

"No, no!" There was no mistaking that the count's proposal was displeasing.

"Mother!" she cried again, looking up into the lady's face, "take me home."

Then suddenly the Princess stooped and took in her own the small clinging hands.

"I should be obliged, Count," she said, "if you would find out where she lives, and I will take her back to her mother."

She stepped into her carriage then, her husband lifting in the little one after her, and she took it on her knee, caressing it softly and speaking to it quietly and gently.

"What is your name, little one?" she questioned.

"Ira," she answered at once. "I am lost," she added a moment after, as if fearing that fact might be lost sight of.

A few moments later Count Waldenberg took his seat opposite, with the information he had gleaned. The child was the daughter of Countess von Bothmer, a widow, and she was staying at the Badischer Hof.

"A widow?" the Princess repeated.

"Yes, your Highness; her husband has been dead only a few months. She is in deep mourning, and goes nowhere."

For all the short distance that lay between the "Golden Lion" and the Badischer Hof, the Princess was silent, her arm round the child, her hand now and then caressing the straying dark locks; but when their destination was reached, kissing the delicate cheek, she bade her go with this lady, placing the small hand in that of her companion.

"Go, little one," she said kindly, "you must come and see me again one day."

At the gentle words and the caress, the child prepared to obey, but of a sudden paused, and, turning back, flung two soft arms round the Princess's neck and kissed her tenderly on both cheeks. And once again, as she stood on the top step in the brilliant sunshine, before entering the house, she looked back, waved her hand and smiled. Then the dark passage swallowed her up, and she was lost to sight.

The Princess, leaning forward, watched till she had disappeared, then turned her eyes to the blue cloudless sky overhead; but the pressure of those soft arms about her throat oppressed her, those little tender kisses were still upon her cheeks, the blue above was growing misty and indistinct. Far away in the dull little town where was her home, a tall stalwart boy was acquiring the knowledge that was to help him one day to take his father's place in the hearts of his people. But this boy, dear as he was, had passed beyond her fostering care; he belonged to his father, to his country, only by his love to the woman who had borne him.

Once, however, life had looked different. Once, when the sad-eyed woman had been young, with a passionate joy in all that made life so dear, a tiny baby daughter had nestled in her arms, and she had seen her future in its sweet eyes. They may take my son, she had thought—they *will* take him—but my little daughter is my own, to remain always my own.

Alas! one day the nursery had been closed because the son had outgrown it, and the daughter had passed for ever beyond its happy precincts.

There was a new name amongst those of her line facing the sad mother in the castle chapel—the youngest there, she always noticed—and she was left alone to make what she could of life.

She had hoped for so long that some day she would hold to her heart another little one, who should in a measure comfort her for what she had lost, but it was not to be. The one son on earth, the one daughter in heaven, were to be the children whom God had given.

Small wonder was it then that the tears stole into her eyes at the touch of the little stranger, though when she became aware of the fact she turned her eyes earthwards again. As she did so, her husband leaning forward just touched her hand with his.

The little daughter had been very dear to him also, but Heaven had been merciful in granting that the terrible illness which had struck both children had spared the heir.

It was a grief still to look back upon, and affected him yet, though in a less degree. But now Fräulein von Etzen had returned with a graceful message from the child's mother, Count Waldenberg had taken his seat, and the two were no longer alone, but obliged to think of those who faced them, only the Princess was more silent than usual.

But that little episode, small pebble though it was, thrown into the tranquil waters of their life, had nevertheless for all those concerned, ever widening ripples. The calm broken-hearted widow came in obedience to the expressed wish of the Princess, and the two women became acquainted, the mourning mother and the mourning wife.

Something approaching friendship sprang up between the two; between the Princess with her duties and pleasures, which divided her as it were from those about her, and which served to teach her the hard lesson that she was first a Princess and then a mother, who, in following her duty, had conquered her despair, and the tall, dark-eyed Englishwoman who had buried her love dream in her German husband's grave, saving out of this wreck of her life the child's love only, the little slender three-year-old child, who danced along by her slow steps, who caressed her cold cheek, and clung to her in love and tenderness, which seemed a reflection of that love that she herself had poured out on its dead father. Was this child's doom to be the same as hers? Such passionate love to meet such requital?

And then she would pause and strive to still the wild thoughts, strive to remember that it was the great barrier that had checked the flow of the river, that no earthly disillusion had come, that in the four years in which it had been permitted her to be his cherished wife, nothing had happened to render the past grievous to look back upon.

There was mutual attraction for the two women in each other's companionship. Afterwards they met often, and as time passed, the recurring summers found them again and again under the lindens, and in the dull solemn rooms of the "Golden Lion."

Though, after all, it seemed it could scarcely have been so, for the dark-eyed child was only seven years old when, one bright June day, the Princess found herself once more in the well-remembered place, and being there, and requesting to be informed if Countess Bothmer had arrived, was told that her friend was dead, that life had proved too hard for her, and that she had lifted the curtain and passing behind, had entered where is peace.

But without, was left the child, deploring its vaguely comprehended loss; crying aloud for its mother in the stormy passionate way that the mother used to recognize as the foreshadowing of the

pain that tender heart was to feel, unless life went well with it. And the Princess, too, remembered as if it were yesterday, the touch of those soft arms about her neck, those sweet kisses on her lips.

"What has become of the child?" she asked. And the Count hastened to tell her that he had learnt they were writing to England from her mother's German home, to see if any of her relations were willing to care for her.

"They are poor," he added, "and so, I fear, are her mother's people."

But as he talked, into the sorrowing Princess's heart came a great resolve that the child should not seek its home beyond the seas, but in the dreary empty nurseries of Waldstein.

And as she resolved, so one day it came to pass. The moving years granted a faint reflection of that daughter's love for which she had long vainly yearned; and though fourteen years had since come and gone, never, so it seemed to her, had she again felt such desolation as had afflicted her when she looked up into the clear blue sky that summer afternoon.

Once more after that had the deserted nurseries been opened, and had echoed to a happy child's voice; had opened never to be closed again, for this time the child who outgrew them and passed beyond their portals, did not spread wings and leave a pang in each unused toy, which must be shut away to save the mother's heart.

And as the summers passed the tiny dark-eyed baby grew into a slim girl, a girl who, nominally, was the charge of Madame D'Egville, but who in reality was the plaything of the court, and beyond that, the object on which all the warm heart of the Princess seemed to outpour itself.

This was the daughter she had imagined that blonde-haired baby would have grown into, this was the sister whom young Prince Oscar should have had to care for, and protect.

No dread haunted her, as the slim girl developed into a beautiful dark-browed maiden, that another love than that of brother and sister might grow up between these two who had been for so long so much to one another.

No, the fourteen years, in which the boy had stood to the girl as elder brother, precluded that. It was not that she combated, or put the fear aside—the fear had never been there.

She had never been a handsome woman, and now time had dulled the bright blonde hair that had been the glory of her girlhood; but the reflective pain that had showed in her blue eyes that summer under the lindens had burnt itself away, and only calmness was left. Standing now in the soft brilliance of hundreds of wax-lights, she was fairer to look upon than she had been in her youth, especially when, as now, her eyes were turned towards the girl by her side: a girl with eyes and hair dark as night, in comparison with the delicate colourless cheeks. And,

looking at her, the Princess—remembering the pang that had shot through her desolate heart when first she had seen her—felt afresh grateful to the fate which had granted her so much comfort.

It was not often quiet little Waldstein was the scene of so much gaiety as this ball promised to be.

But it was an occasion.

A year ago, Prince Oscar, hitherto such an exceptional Heir Apparent as to require nothing beyond the work his regiment afforded, had announced his intention of going away to travel, to see the world and enlarge his mind with wider scenes.

"He gives that as his reason," the Princess had said to Ira, "but I trust, I hope, he is realizing that it is time to bring home a wife. Do you think so?" as no comment had followed her previous words.

"It seems possible," the girl answered.

"'There is no hurry,' he says," remarked the Princess, pursuing her own train of thought, "but—his father grows old, and so do I. It would please me to see him married."

"Tell him so," the girl said. "I am sure there is nothing you could wish that he would not do."

"But I would not urge it," replied the Princess, and sighed. "I would rather he had the chance of choosing his happiness. He has been a good son and brother," stroking the girl's head as it rested against her knee, "he will make a good and faithful husband."

"Yes." It was whispered low, but the Princess heard the assent. It was one subject on which these two hearts were uniformly in accord—their appreciation of this only son, who in their view did his work so well in the world, that he merited the crown of success.

Well, now he had had his chance. One whole year he had been roving hither and thither. He had seen much that the world has to show. European civilization, Eastern splendour, it had all unrolled itself before his eyes, and he had returned to the dull little German town, where this court ball was the welcome home.

He had driven in late this afternoon, under triumphal arches and drooping gaudy flags. Strange faces had looked forth a welcome; friendly voices had spoken their joy at again seeing him; his father, his mother, his adopted sister, had all shown how near and dear he was to them, but as yet, in all the talk, no word had fallen on the mother's ear telling that her suspicions had been correct, that some other object than sight-seeing had been in his thoughts when he went away. And she determined that if no word came from him, she would herself speak on the subject so near to her heart. "His father grows old and more feeble," she thought, her eyes wandering in his direction. "It would please him to see his grandchild. He has had time to please himself,

but if that is not to be, he must think of others; he does not stand alone." And there was a momentary tightening of her heart as she remembered occasions when it had behoved her not to consider her own wishes; and she called to mind her own axiom, "A Princess first, afterwards a woman." And he was a man, and better able to learn the lesson.

But, so thinking, remembered for one little moment, without regret, the blue-eyed daughter who also might have had some such bitter lesson to learn. No, the adopted daughter was better, she, so lovely and free—free to follow the dictates of her own heart, and give hand and love to any good man who might desire the gift.

Meantime the musicians played on, and from her seat on a slightly elevated dais, the Princess was enabled to review the dancers as they circled before her. She did not often stay long at a ball, indeed a ball at this court was an unusual affair, but to-night she remained, though the Prince had withdrawn. He was much older than she, and of late he had grown very feeble, and anything unusual fatigued him. But she herself, in her son's home coming, felt an excitement that precluded fatigue, or was it a faint thrill at the thought of the words she knew would have to be spoken on the morrow.

Her eyes sought him now, and rested with pride and pleasure on the tall, stalwart form. Of beauty, he had little or none; he was homely-looking, but his plain face was true and honest, and the grey eyes could flash with fire or soften with love.

"He dances with every one," she thought, noting how religiously he changed his partner with every dance, "except—no, he has not danced with Ira. But that is better. She will not mind, and others might be disappointed."

She will not mind!

If the man seemed to mete out his favours equally, so did the girl. There was no one to whom a shade more seemed granted than the strictest etiquette enforced. She was a court lady, a favoured maid of honour, always in attendance, and in addition, had been known to many present since she was a tiny child.

To whoever approached and asked her, she gave her hand indiscriminately for waltz or quadrille, or whatever was demanded; and after each dance, as the last note sounded, she came back to the Princess's side and stood there. When she first entered the room, there had been a faint flush on her cheeks, born of the excitement of the hour, perhaps added to by the admiration her appearance excited; but as the hours passed the flush faded and she grew whiter, and the smiles about her mouth rarer.

Time went on; the Princess was already speaking of retiring, and Ira was ready also, she did not feel inclined for more dancing. She was tired, she must be, unusual though that was, when—her own thought seemed repeated aloud close beside her.

"You are tired."

She turned her head, the Prince stood beside her.

"Yes," she faltered, scarce knowing what she said.

"Take one turn with me, nevertheless," he said.

It was almost a command, and he did not hesitate, but put his strong arm about her slender waist and led her away.

On went the music, another of those sweet vales which had been sounding all the evening, but Ira was no longer tired. The quickened beats of her heart, the rhythmic motion of the dance, were all alike in tune, and to Prince Oscar also, with his arm about her, something new and happier had come. But it was only a few moments' respite, one of those pitiful, brief moments we buy or steal from time.

The music ceased—the Princess was standing up.

"Good-night, Ira," he said, this time he spoke her name.

"Good-night; it is as well,—you are tired."

"I *was* tired," she assented softly, or did she merely amend his speech? "Good-night."

Then she passed away from one pair of eyes that watched her till she was out of sight, a tall, slender girl, in shining folds of satin, with pearls twisted into her dark hair and about her white arms and throat; a girl whose happy future possibilities many joined with the Princess in envying.

"To-morrow," the Princess thought, as she passed up the wide stairs, "I will speak. He has been ever a good son, he will obey my wish."

But when to-morrow came, there was hurrying to and fro, sorrowing of heart and mourning for one who had departed.

The Prince was dead, and the Princess was weeping in lonely widowhood over the faithful heart, stilled for ever.

The husband of her youth, the father of this stalwart son, who strove to comfort her, of that dead daughter.

But there was one living yet to whom she could turn for consolation. Whilst this girl was there to twine her arms about her and kiss her, she was not quite alone. It seemed to her in this first terrible lonely hour that she was reaping some of the great harvest of love she had been so richly sowing all these many years.

Marriage and the future, with its cares and anxieties, were alike forgotten. But even death can only push aside earthly plans for a moment. He is supreme for his little hour of kingship, but even while he is supreme, the hour is running to its close, and his worshippers are fain, first in thought and then in deed, to turn to other things. With her husband in his grave, and her son standing in his father's place, more than ever did it seem necessary to consider that great question of his future wife. The wooing would now be done with a heavy heart—the Princess sighed as she thought of it—but public duties must be considered first, and so she spoke.

Spoke tenderly and kindly, as all his life she had ever spoken when it had seemed to her it was well to do so, and he listened courteously to what she had to say. He did not look at her; once he rose and took a turn about the room, and when he came back he pushed his chair a little nearer to hers, so that they were not face to face, but when she had spoken, he assented:

"You are right," he said; "after Saturday I will speak to you again. Till then, I will consider the subject."

Saturday was the day on which the new Prince was to take the oaths to his country.

The Princess was satisfied.

There had been no distaste shown to the subject—no levity. The position in which he now stood had impressed its seriousness upon him, and he would not fail.

When he had so spoken, he did not linger. He kissed her before he left, but he added nothing to his previous words.

When he had gone, the Princess sent for Ira, and a few minutes later she entered the room, looking taller and paler than ever in her heavy mourning dress.

Seated by the elder woman's side, the latter told her of the weight that had been lifted from her heart by Prince Oscar's willing acquiescence.

The girl's head was resting against the Princess's knee, and she laid her hand upon it.

"You have been a good daughter to me, Ira, you are as dear to me as if you were in truth my own; you feel for him, I know, you, who are brotherless, as a sister, therefore, I tell to you my trouble and my relief."

"I, who am brotherless," the girl repeated. "Yes, I wish him well, as dearly as if I were his sister. Is he not your son," and she kissed the hand she held, "my dear, adopted mother?"

She was still resting thus when the Prince re-entered the room. He changed colour a little when he saw his mother was no longer alone, but Ira did not. She would have risen had not the Princess's restraining hand prevented her, so she remained on in the same position. But her eyes followed the restless steps of the man as he paced once or twice up and down the apartment; then he paused by his mother's side, looking down at the two women, with whom for fourteen years his life had been so intimate, and from whom now, it was decreed, he should take the dividing step.

Not for love's sake, but for duty.

He paused, standing thus a moment, and then: "Ira," he said, and his voice was quiet and grave, like his face, "my mother—our mother—has been telling me that the time has come when I should marry; that I owe this to those over whom I am called to rule, and I have agreed to a wish that seems to her, and to me also, to be right. I desired to tell you this myself," he went on,

"because of the many, many years during which you have been a dear sister to me ; I wished to keep nothing back from you."

"You were right and kind," she replied, kneeling up, but still with one hand clasping the Princess's. "Everything that concerns you I am glad to hear—everything that can make you happier I wish for."

"It is not happiness my mother urges, but duty."

"Perhaps, my son—let us trust it will be so—the one will include the other."

He made no reply in words. He stooped and kissed his mother and was turning away, when he took a step back, and bending down, took in his own the girl's small white hand and pressed it to his lips.

Saturday came, and both women in their mourning robes were present, as were all the rank and dignity of the small kingdom, to witness the ceremony of the young Prince's inauguration into his new honours.

He was pale, which was not surprising, but he impressed every one by the gravity and dignity of his look and mien.

It was a grave moment, and as such he met it.

For all his lack of beauty there was much to admire in the manly bearing, the tall strong figure and those honest grey eyes, which looked one fairly in the face with not a thought he wished to hide.

"With all he has, and with what he is," his mother thought, as she watched him, "one must be found to love him for himself. Such a son and brother merits a good wife."

She listened with pride to the clear beautiful voice, whose every syllable reached her ears, as he swore to walk in his father's steps, and preserve his country, as far as in him lay, from foreign foe.

The mother listened with pride, but to the girl by her side it seemed as if each word were a link in the chain that was binding him to the future, a future from which his past was shut out. And after all, what had the past held for him ?

The tender protecting love of a man for a young sister, whom he had watched grow up from babyhood ; but now that it must be cut away, he was ready and able to make his future such as he would have it.

"A man is strong and able to do it," she thought. And so thinking, lifted her eyes and met his.

The vows were made, the burden was taken up, the future accepted, but in accepting it, there was much to which he must bid good-bye.

To him likewise it was the forging of the links, and those links were the future.

It was not in his nature to swerve from the inevitable, and duty represented to him the inevitable. He would scarcely allow him-

self to think that there was another and a brighter side to life, had he only had himself and one other to consider.

Under that grave, somewhat commonplace exterior had grown up and blossomed one beautiful flower, which had bloomed without hope to nourish it, or any possible chance that he might live to enjoy its fragrance; and now the day was come when he must acknowledge to himself that the twelve months' absence had been of no avail, that those previous fourteen years could not be as if they had not existed, that without even speaking of that which was in his heart, he must turn away and form fresh ties for himself: do this, when it seemed to have been revealed to him that if he had been free, his love would have been a treasured gift. Denial is hard to bear, but surely renunciation is harder.

Thus he thought, as he stood, the links forged; himself, his strength, his love, everything he had, vowed to the service of his country, and the sacrifice accepted.

Then it was, in the pause that followed, he looked across the intervening crowd until his eyes rested on those dark ones turned towards him, and they told the story. She understood then, understood, if she had not before, that this was the return demanded of her for all the good gifts that had been hers from babyhood.

He had spared her; no love whispers marred the memory of those happy years she had known.

He had been true and faithful, not because he was cold or indifferent, but because he loved her.

And of her it was demanded that her strength should equal his; that no weakness, no faltering on her part should make harder for him the road he had to tread.

She met his look tenderly, unwaveringly, as if she had spoken and had said: "Trust me, I am strong and courageous," and though for a moment the tears clouded her sight, they did not fall.

Afterwards there was no time for tears. There was the mother to comfort, her proud words to sympathize with.

"He has promised me," she said, "that when the six months of mourning are over he will go to see the Princess Sophie. I have heard much of her, her mother was a friend of mine years ago. It seems desirable at least he should make her acquaintance."

"And he will go?"

"Yes, he has promised."

"That is well, it will make you happier."

"My loved child," and the Princess kissed the girl fondly. "Yes, it will settle the future, which, as it is, remains an anxiety to me. But I shall still have you. I always wished for a daughter, because the country could not rob me of her. I shall have you—for a time—I suppose," and she smiled a little sadly.

"I think you will have me always," the girl replied.

No, there was little time for thought. But in church next day, with the court chaplain preaching an appropriate sermon on crowns and vanities, she was enabled to think a little, and it seemed as if in running accompaniment to his truisms, a counter stream flowed through her own mind.

It was not what they gave, but what they took away that seemed so great to her. Whilst the preacher spoke of the gain, she seemed to feel only the loss ; but perhaps after all it is easy to see the loss in things in which the appreciable gain is not to ourselves.

More clearly than the preacher's words, of which but few reached her ears, was she following out the future of the man who was seated but so few feet from her. His thoughts apparently were not wandering, his grave eyes rested on the preacher's face. With folded arms he remained motionless ; he was possibly following out his own future also, but seeing it in somewhat different hues from those in which the girl was painting it.

Princess Sophie was pretty and winning, she had heard—and the girl's heart ached—and would probably make him a good and tender wife. Well-born, rich and dowered with beauty, he could scarcely do better. And did not she, Ira, wish him to be happy ?

Again that heart-throb. *Did* she wish it at such a cost as that ?

Self could not be conquered yet, she decided ; self must still be much more to her than he was, if that were the case. She turned her eyes away, and the dull winter sunshine streaming in, threw faint reflective colours from a gorgeous painted window on to the inscription that had faced her Sunday after Sunday for fourteen years :

HERE RESTS
D O R O T H E A,
AGED TWO YEARS.

And out from her resting place a voice seemed to speak, bidding her remember that it was hers, this dead child's place she had taken, whose duties she was bound to fulfil. "It is in my name you love him," the voice said ; "remember it is in mine, his sister's place, you stand."

"I will remember, Dorothea," Ira replied mentally as, by the side of the sorrowing Princess, she turned homewards.

Time passed, spring, a long bitter spring, at last giving way to a faint attempt at something better. But dreary as the spring was, in that sad, widowed household, where every one strove to hide from those with whom they lived the sorrow that filled their days, with such sadness at home, and faint distant throbbings of coming disaster abroad, still to Ira it was more terrible to watch the months slipping away, and to know that the six months were

nearly over, and that then the final step would be taken. It seemed to her it would be worse, and yet as it was, what comfort lay in these dreary nights and days, when she was training herself to meet the inevitable future that was so surely advancing. As to Prince Oscar himself, he met it as he met everything that was put in his way to be accomplished, with a grave aspect that might perhaps hide a great deal of pain. But pain can be borne, often must be; and to make a moan over it only hurts others, and not one whit avails ourselves.

Probably the Princess, in the days when she was young and the waters had overflowed her own soul, had met her troubles with some such strong countenance. But she was older now, and feebler, and clung ever more and more closely to the girl who was always with her.

"I fear, Ira, I lose my courage somewhat, but I have borne much."

"It is over now," the girl answered soothingly.

"Yes, one outlives it all, until one wonders whether the gain were worth the suffering. Perhaps, if we could only understand it at the time, we should see how needless is the pain we endure. If we could only then believe that we should outlive it!"

"But we do not," Ira replied with sudden comprehension. "It is all there, woven into your life. You would not be to me what you are without it."

And scarcely understanding the full meaning of the words, kissing her, the mother's heart was comforted.

But whilst they prepared, the man and the girl, in such different ways for the swiftly approaching future, the cold grays of spring were melting into the golden greens of early summer. The time of promise was approaching more nearly its glad consummation, whilst the man went calmly about his daily work seemingly unmoved, and the girl fought and struggled, and passionately wept and prayed, offering up her hope, her love, everything she had to yield; learning day by day what the struggle was to cost, envying Prince Oscar his calm, which she scarcely understood. Perhaps his simpler nature was not fully comprehended by the more complex one of hers who watched him. Perhaps what she attributed to a thousand varied motives, such as ruled her own passionate soul, was in reality but a willing, brave obedience to a law that it was impossible to combat.

But at length the day came on which she looked to have bidden him farewell, the day on which she had so often pictured him riding away in a direction where her thoughts could too easily follow him, guessing so fully all the future. Seeing on to the end of the journey, even to the return home; on to the happy day when he should re-enter the little town, as he had done once before, under flower-wreathed arches and drooping flags, only this time a fair girl would be seated by his side, and marriage bells

clashing overhead. All this she had pictured to herself so often, and yet it was not to be—at least not now. Instead of going forth in search of his bride, all gentler thoughts had to be put away for the moment, all personal hopes merged in the one necessity of arming and joining with those who, hand in hand, were sallying forth to meet the enemy whose threatening voices reached them from the farther shore.

All the little Court of Waldstein was stirred, faintly thrilled in response to the rising tumult abroad. Young and old alike declared themselves ready to join with those who were eager to avenge the insult to their country. There was no lack of ready soldiers even in this dull little town. It was with pride that the Princess told Ira of the regiments that should serve to swell the advancing army. But to neither of them had one fear come.

"Not you, Oscar, not you," his mother cried, learning his decision. "There are so many others. We give our soldiers, our money, everything we have—but not you. Do you stay to guard and care for us." And as he still shook his head, "There are older men, men who have had experience; it is right that they should go——"

"And I also, mother. It is decided. Do you doubt me?" he smiled a little. "I am a good soldier. Ask those who know."

But she only clung to him and wept. "My son, all that I have left, I am weak and cowardly. I cannot bear to part from you."

"You have Ira, mother. She will comfort you."

"Yes, yes, she is dear to me also. But that you should go now, when I had hoped that you would be preparing for such a different expedition."

"It is a reprieve," he replied.

He did not smile; he seemed merely to be giving utterance to the simple thought of his heart, but the words checked his mother's tears, and something of his own stillness and gravity entered into her.

There is an intuition that love alone can give, and for a moment her heart seemed to echo the thought of his.

"It is a reprieve."

That was the thought of another heart, as Ira entered the room at the summons of the Princess, to bid farewell to Oscar.

Her eyes were circled with dark shadows, the result of many sleepless hours, and her mouth had forgotten its smiles, but then the time was too anxious for every woman in the land to admit of gaiety.

And yet, until she entered the room and saw him standing by his mother's side, his mother in her heavy black robes, her feverish hand clasping his, her anxious eyes turned towards him—until then, the possibly darker, more fateful issue of this reprieve had never occurred to her.

But now in one moment, it seemed as if she saw what hitherto had been hidden from her sight—or was it that she had refused to see?

That there are other issues possible in this world of ours—that sometimes the knot we cannot untie is cut by a Fate no less kind than cruel.

Was she thinking all this, standing white and still within a few paces of the pair in the window—or were his grave steady eyes telling it to her?

The colour was leaving her cheeks, her lips; she knew it, and she stretched out her hand to the one she felt was ready to take it.

Such a strong hand! It steadied for a moment the fluttering heart, and again she saw clearly, heard distinctly the voice that spoke.

"Ira," that same soft mention of her name as on the night of the ball—as on the day when he had told her he had decided to marry, "Ira, I am going away. In your charge I leave my mother. By the memory of the fourteen years in which we have loved each other—and her—do not fail me."

"I will not fail you."

Her voice was now quite steady again, her eyes did not droop before his. No, it was not she who would fail.

"When I return"—his arm was about his mother, but his hand still retained the slender one he had taken—"we will again resume the threads of our daily life—if I return," he amended. "If I do not"—even his mother was hushed by the quiet voice—"I have told you my wish. Remember whose place you have held all these years, remember that in that case you will have to fill my place also."

"I will try."

Stooping he kissed his mother, gently unclasping her hand from his arm.

"Whatever happens, Ira," kissing once the hand he held, "I shall look back with happiness to the years I have spent here. I am happier now at the thought that you are here; my trust in you is so perfect that it spares me some trouble to know that I leave my mother in your care."

The tears were in her eyes, though they did not fall, but her voice she could not control. It was in silence that she drew her hand from his; in silence, except for one faltering farewell, she watched him move away. But as he stood thus, his hand on the lock, with but one step to take him out of her sight, perhaps for ever, the momentary weakness was conquered.

She took a few swift steps to his side, repeating his name, "Oscar!"

At the word he looked back and paused as she approached him, holding out her arms.

"Oscar," she said again, low and tenderly, "my dear, dear brother, I cannot let you go like this. After so many years of a sister's tenderest love, I cannot let you leave me without bidding, 'God bless you, and bring you safely back to us,' without the kiss which we never parted without for so many years."

It seemed to Ira that for the first time there was a faint shadow of wavering in the eyes that had met hers so bravely these last six months, a look of pain which had not been there before she spoke. But it vanished, was conquered in a moment; he stooped his head a little, and she clasped her arms about his neck and kissed him softly, in memory of those bygone happy days. Then his lips touched her forehead where the dark hair waved, and he was gone, and she remained to obey his last words and comfort his sorrowing mother.

And after all the knot was cut, not left to weak mortal fingers to struggle with and vainly endeavour to untie.

One swift shot on the battle-field decided the question which had perplexed so many; but the decision, if it gave peace to one, broke one woman's heart. She had outlived so much, but this left her a drooping, desolate shadow of her former self; a shadow which only lived in the memory of what had been, a memory that Ira's tenderness alone could call out of the past.

To Ira herself it seemed the end had come before; he was scarcely more dead now than when he had turned back that summer morning at her soft call and had let her kiss him for farewell. Then he had gone, taking with him the sunshine, after that nothing could happen of any great importance.

That was his "Good-bye" to her, and that it was said on the threshold of life or of death seemed but of trifling moment. In some subtle fashion she understood that it was well with him; that he did not grieve over the greater form the reprieve had taken.

She did not weep or lament; she but gathered up the broken threads and did what she could.

There was his last wish to be fulfilled, his mother to be cared for. And it was well she was there, for in this fresh building up of the German fatherland the little court, that had been her home, was no longer needed. There was no one to be put aside, no one to seize the sceptre and dispute its possession. He who should have ruled, slept with his fathers, and there was no one to take his place.

The vision that had haunted the girl so long of the day when he should enter the welcoming city under flags and arches, with his bride by his side, did not arise to trouble her. Instead it was a soldier's funeral that passed slowly through black-hung streets. Sad music wailing through the air, telling of the hope of a house laid low; the masterless steed, the weeping spectators,

it all seemed grievously to speak of a life of promise broken in twain.

For the young sleeper, for the broken-hearted mother, there was mourning everywhere. Only to one girl the tears were mingled with some faint far-off shadow of peace;—only by her, through some swift subtle intuition that love alone can give, it was understood that when the Reprieve was enlarged into the wider order of Release, it was with joy, not sorrow, the command was heard.

WILKIE COLLINS.

By H. CHARTRES,

AUTHOR OF "KING SOLOMON'S WIVES," "A CHANGELING," ETC.

FEW have worked harder than the veteran novelist who has just passed away. Of his numerous books some are admirable, all are readable. To a certain extent he was his own worst rival. Although he was not afraid of the author of the "Woman in White," it must have been a hard task to follow that masterpiece of sensational fiction. Only the historian of the "Moonstone" could have done so with success. Which is the better is still an open question. Those who only know his later works may have some difficulty in understanding the enthusiasm with which his earlier successes were received. Towards the end, his style, never his strongest point, was disfigured by mannerisms, which must have had rather an irritating effect upon the student, whose criticism was not softened by a remembrance of the author at his best. There was a tone he was very fond of—for want of a better expression it may be described as a species of literary archness—which at times must have galled the gentlest reader. To the last he told his stories as well as ever; but the story was not always so well worth the telling. When Wilkie Collins deserted tea to turn his attention to literature, the American school of infinite analysis was unknown, and the reading public inclined to the belief that a novelist should have a story to tell. In a preface to the "Woman in White," Wilkie Collins states his own views on this subject:

"I have always held the old-fashioned opinion that the primary object of a work of fiction should be to tell a story, and I have never believed that the novelist who properly performed this first condition was in danger on that account of neglecting the delineation of character. It may be possible in novel writing to present character successfully without telling a story, but it is not possible to tell a story successfully without presenting character."

That Wilkie Collins was a novelist of sensation was quite enough to provoke the antagonism of the new school. Sensational novels, they argued, are often deficient in study of character. These novels are sensational; therefore we decide, off-hand, that the characters in them are puppets, and unworthy a superior critic's attention. This was the kind of reasoning by which it was sought to deprecate a success they could not deny. With the great novel-reading public

Wilkie Collins has always been popular. A few years ago the *Pall Mall Gazette* published a competition for the most popular living author. Wilkie Collins distanced all competitors. One may not agree with the verdict, but it shows that his best work has not been forgotten. Of nothing is the superior critic so fond as to find fault with a thing, excellent in its way, because it does not happen to be something quite different, which the critic prefers. We all know the popular novel of this kind of person. Its tone is intensely sad, because if you are not sad it argues that you are not a person of culture, and this style of fiction appeals alone to the cultured. Moods have their fashion like everything else, and many a person whom nature intended to be a practical joker, with a taste for Dickens, reads Ibsen gloomily and cultivates in melancholy the pleasure of being sad. The heroine dresses beautifully and is married to an unsympathetic husband. Somehow or other, though he is often a rascal, one never has the heart to be seriously angry with the husband. For the rest, a middle-aged admirer with a taste for mild flirtation, and a young man thrown in as a foil; generally he has been blighted early and is ladylike in his habits and addicted to cheap cynicism. Sometimes the heroine's father is introduced, a nice old man, who collects butterflies. He is always popular, perhaps because one sees so little of him. Nothing ever happens. The characters sit in chairs and talk to one another. When they do not do this, the author talks about them. They are all brilliant, at least we are told so—you might not guess it from their conversation—except the middle-aged philosopher. He is admittedly dull. He makes up for this by being worthy. After about four hundred pages of this there is a death, generally his. You survive it better than the heroine, who lives unhappily ever afterwards, not that she ever was remarkable for cheerfulness. The only person who is happy is the rascally husband, who does not live with his wife, but enjoys himself indefinitely, generally at Paris. One feels he must have gone through a good deal, and makes allowances. Lady readers are less charitable; they despise him, and say it's a beautiful story. After a course of fiction on these lines, the average man wants a change. If only the worthy admirer would harden his heart and run away with the heroine—a course he has been obviously anxious to adopt all along—it would be something; but one knows he won't, and the knowledge depresses you. One longs with a certain shamefacedness for a good old-fashioned novel of incident—a novel, as Thackeray says, "without love or talking, or any of that sort of nonsense, but containing plenty of fighting, robbing and rescuing." Not so long ago it was almost a cry of despair. We were led captive by the American school. In their victory they trampled on our necks and destroyed our idols. Thackeray and Dickens were out of date, so we were informed, and Mr. Howells clinched the matter by announcing that all the stories had been told. It was a time of tribulation

and dreary captivity, but the deliverer was at hand. It was the ingenious editor of *Truth*, ever the champion of the oppressed, who discovered the new David who was to slay with a shilling book our intolerable Goliath. With "Called Back" began the revival of the sensational novel. The short notice in *Truth* which first brought it into notice, declared it was as exciting as anything Wilkie Collins had written in his best days.

Perhaps some of the young generation of novel readers were induced by this to turn back to the "Woman in White" and the "Moonstone." In that case they owed another debt to the author of "Called Back." It is not improbable. A reading public, which is reduced to seeking its arid sensation in African deserts and the slipshod interiors of hansom cabs, could not afford to disregard the best sensational novels in English. Still, the modern critic has never quite forgiven Wilkie Collins for being a sensational novelist. It may not be the highest type of novel—our author was himself conscious of that; but at its best it is a very good thing. Nothing is probably easier than to write a bad sensational story, and nothing harder than to write a good one.

At the commencement of "Fallen Leaves" these remarks were addressed to "readers in general:" "The two qualities in fiction which hold the highest rank in your estimation are character and humour. I have always myself tried to combine the different merits of a good novel in one and the same work, and I have never succeeded in keeping an equal balance. In the present story you will find the scales inclining on the whole in favour of character and humour. This has not happened accidentally—advancing years and health that stands sadly in need of improvement warn me, if I am to vary my way of work, that I may have little time to lose. Without waiting for future opportunities, I have kept your standard of merit more constantly before my eyes in writing this book."

In spite of his efforts, it is by his novels of plot and incident that he will be known.

"Fallen Leaves" was not a success. The idea of a young socialist, Amelius Goodenheart, who has been educated in a body of primitive Christian socialists, of Illinois, U.S., and comes over to London to see the world, is full of opportunities. How Amelius uses them is a matter of opinion. The world did not agree with Wilkie Collins, and there was a good deal to be said for its view. Mrs. Grundy was shocked, and the second edition of his adventures has never been published. It would have been an interesting book, but would not probably have added to his fame. Wilkie Collins's touch was hardly delicate enough for his subject, though a more harmless book was never written. It is curious to note an occasional rebellion against the respectable despotism of the amiable tradesman who presides over our novels. His earliest success, "Basil," is said to have offended some. An illustrated

paper, in which "The Law and the Lady" appeared, considered it necessary to apologize for certain passages—one does not quite know why.

In the "New Magdalen," a somewhat unfortunate title, one feels the moral is rather inverted. One ought, and probably would, if she were not such an uninteresting person, sympathize with Grace Roseberry when she rises from the dead, practically, to find that no one wants her after the effort.

In the pages of "Belgravia" he revenged himself on Mrs. Grundy by making the heroine of one of his stories marry her groom. This was bad enough; but not content with that, he allowed her to live happily with him ever afterwards, which was more than the polite public would stand. The comparison with Gaboriau and Boisgobey is inevitable, but it is not one the English writer need fear. The interest in Gaboriau's tales is narrower. He is solely the novelist of crime. His stories are all police stories. Then again, there is a sameness in his method. The plan of beginning at the end and devoting the rest of the book to explaining how he got there (what Anthony Trollope called the cart before the horse method) becomes monotonous. With Gaboriau the story is everything. One is fascinated by his extraordinary ingenuity, and aghast at the circumstantial evidence piled up against the hero, although it never takes you in again; but the characters never interest except in so far as they are incidental to the tale. The immortal Lecocq himself, glorious and impassive as he is, proves but a shadowy acquaintance. One feels that if ever it became necessary to employ one of those gentlemen who are to be trusted (as the advertisements say) to conduct confidential inquiries for the nobility and gentry with discretion, we would probably get some one much more like our humbler friend, Sergeant Cuff.

Boisgobey had a marvellous gift of opening his story with a curdling effect, but too frequently allows his imagination to run riot. He has no self-restraint. There is a sublime disregard of probabilities that puts us unnecessarily on our guard. What could be better than the opening pages of "La Tresse Blonde?" A party of young men, after a late supper, ride across the Bois de Boulogne. Meeting an old man with a basket, what more natural than that, out of sheer gaiety of heart, they should snatch the basket off his back and ride away with it. To their astonishment, instead of pursuing them, he plunges into the forest and disappears. The basket is opened and a woman's head is found inside—a woman's head covered with resplendent golden hair. Could anything be fuller of more delightful promise? Somehow or other it is not fulfilled. In pursuit of the owner of the head, we wander into sewers, and somehow or other, after incredible adventures, get lost in the quicksands of Normandy. If we are conscientious we persevere to the end, but the temptation to skip is irresistible, and

before we finish, we are rather sorry the lady in question was not like Captain Mayne Reid's horseman—without a head to cause all this bother.

Wilkie Collins, while his plots were marvels of constructive ingenuity, had, in spite of the superior critics, the gift of interesting us in his characters. They may be subordinate to his plot, but they are unmistakably there. In Fosco we have quite an original villain. Gone is the theory for ever that fat implies good-nature. It is said that Fosco grew obese by accident. It has been suggested that a lady complained to the author of the "*Woman in White*" that in her travels in Novel-land she had never encountered a fat villain. We prefer to believe it otherwise; Fosco thin would lose all his charm. Miss Halcombe, the brave woman of the story, is charming. How well the incident is told where she creeps along the verandah and listens to Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde plotting in the smoking-room below. Walter Hartwright tells his story in a manly way, and Pesca, who saves the whole situation at the crisis, is delightful; even his wicked baronet, Sir Percival Glyde, that good old puppet of fiction, does not creak too obviously. His heroes are pleasant gentlemen, and we can understand their falling in love with the heroine. His humour has been described as forced and mechanical. Like most disciples of Dickens, he did not always imitate the best points of his master. Still, there is humour in his books. If one is not quite so surprised at learning that Miss Clack's Diary, in the "*Moonstone*," was written during a severe attack of rheumatic fever, as the author intended, the steward Betteredge, whose *vade mecum* is "*Robinson Crusoe*," in the same work, is full of humour. What can be better than Betteredge's account of his marriage? his courtship, actuated by "economy, with a dash of love;" his misgivings as the time draws near, and his attempt to get out of it, "in obedience to the laws," by offering his future wife "a feather bed and fifty shillings to be off the bargain." His misgivings were not altogether without foundation, according to his summing-up of the married state: "How it was I don't understand, but we always seemed, with the best of motives, to be getting in one another's way. When I wanted to go upstairs, there was my wife coming down; or when my wife wanted to go down, there was I coming up. That is married life according to my experience of it." The whole of Betteredge's story is spontaneously funny. There is none of that effort which one feels in some of his other studies.

Every one likes Sergeant Cuff, the detective, whose only ambition is to retire and grow his roses in peace. In the "*Woman in White*," Pesca, the little Italian, with his zeal for everything English, including our athletic amusements, which he is firmly persuaded he can master by the light of nature, is decidedly amusing—conventional, if you will, but still entertaining. Mr.

Fairlie is a capital sketch of a thoroughly selfish hypochondriac; and after reading "Man and Wife," one is not sorry to have made the acquaintance of Sir Peter Lundie. Mr. James Payn somewhere complains that nature is the worst plagiarist, and points out how unblushingly she has stolen some of his best incidents. In "Armada" there is a most admirable description of a recent agitation, written, though it was, years before. So curious is the resemblance that, in spite of the length of the extract, we venture to give it here.

Young Bashwood, it must be explained, is describing to his father a passage in Miss Gwilt's career:—"The two legal points relied on for the defence were: first, there was no evidence to connect her with the possession of poison; and secondly, that the medical witnesses differed in their conclusions as to the particular drug which had killed him, both good points and both well worked; but the evidence on the other side bore down everything before it. The prisoner was proved to have had no less than three excellent reasons for killing her husband. He had treated her with almost unexampled barbarity. He had left her in a will mistress of a fortune on his death, and she was, by her own confession, contemplating an elopement with another man. Having set forth these motives, the prosecution next showed by evidence, which was never once shaken on any one single point, that the one person in the house who could by any human possibility have administered the poison was the prisoner at the bar. What could the judge and jury do with such evidence before them as this? The verdict was 'Guilty' as a matter of course, and the judge declared that he agreed with it. The female portion of the audience was in hysterics, and the male portion of it was not much better. The judge sobbed and the bar shuddered. She was sentenced to death in such a scene as had never been previously witnessed in a court of justice."

So far, allowing for a few differences of detail, the parallel is pretty close. What follows:—"On the evening of the trial two or three of the young bucaniers of literature went down to two or three newspaper offices and wrote two or three heartrending leading articles on the proceedings in court. The next morning the public caught light like tinder, and the prisoner was tried over again before an amateur court of justice in the columns of the newspapers."

Those who read their newspapers in August last—some happier mortals may have been beyond their reach—will not have much difficulty in recognizing the rest.

"All the people who had no personal experience whatever on the subject seized their pens and rushed (by kind permission of the editors) into print. Doctors who had not attended the sick man, and who had not been present at the examination of the body, declared by dozens he had died a natural death. Barristers with-

out business, who had not heard the evidence, attacked the jury, who had, and judged the judge who had sat on the bench before some of them were born. The general public followed the lead of the barristers and the doctors, and the young bucaniers who had set the thing going. Here was the law they all paid to protect them doing its duty in dreadful earnest! Shocking! Shocking! The British public rose to protest as one man against the working of its own machinery, and the Home Secretary in a state of distraction went to the judge. The judge held firm. He had said it was the right verdict at the time, and said so still. 'But suppose,' says the Home Secretary, 'that the prosecution had tried some other way of proving her guilty at the trial than the way they did try—what would you and the jury have done then?' Of course, it was quite impossible for the judge to say. This comforted the Home Secretary to begin with, and when he got the judge's consent after that to have the conflict of medical evidence submitted to one great doctor, and when the one great doctor took the merciful view, after expressly stating in the first instance that he knew practically nothing of the merits of the case, the Home Secretary was perfectly satisfied. The prisoner's death-warrant went into the waste-paper basket, and the verdict of the newspapers carried the day."

For those who are curious upon the subject of coincidences, Wilkie Collins tells an interesting story in an appendix to "Armada." At the end of that fascinating work, Miss Gwilt has determined to murder Allan Armadale in Dr. Downard's sanatorium. It is to be done by introducing poisoned air into the room where he is sleeping. At the crisis she relents, and carrying him out of the fatal room, returns to die there herself. As a new method of murder this created considerable interest at the time. A year and a half, as the author tells us, since the end of "Armada" was sketched, a vessel lay at Liverpool, which was looked after by one man who slept on board, in the capacity of ship-keeper. On a certain day in the week this man was found dead in the deck-house. On the next day a second man who took his place was carried dying to the Northern Hospital. On the third day a third ship-keeper was appointed, and was found dead in the deck-house, which had already proved fatal to the other two. The name of that ship was the "Armada," and the proceedings at the inquest proved that the three men had all been suffocated by sleeping in poisoned air.

There have been few writers who have written more engrossing books. His were bad books to pick up for the casual ten minutes before the dressing bell. The ten minutes went very quickly, and found you still reading at the end, and before you knew where you were you found yourself distressingly late for dinner. He certainly had the gift of exciting his readers. He not only tried to make your flesh creep, but succeeded in that enthralling

operation. The effect is produced by legitimate means; he is no believer in the mere vulgar piling up of horrors for horror's sake. He has none of the thirst for blood of the modern shilling dreadful. In the "Moonstone," perhaps his best story, there is only one murder, and that is done behind the scenes.

Even the lazy boy at Chur, who by this time, if his kindly observer's prophecy be true, must know most plots, and is no longer surprised when the stranger turns out to be the rightful earl, would have to exert all his ingenuity—experience will help him little, as the idea of the theft is absolutely original—to find out who stole the moonstone. Our interest is secured from the moment we hear the history of the diamond. From its disappearance the most hardened novel devourer (it would almost excite a publisher's reader) sits breathless while suspicion is tossed from one to another until the real culprit is traced by the boy with the gooseberry eyes.

There is only one point in "The Moonstone" where, possibly owing to a sceptical mind, we are conscious of a little mistrust. In that second experiment with the opium can we be quite sure that Franklin Blake is not shamming? He did not steal the stone, so there would not be much harm done if he were. There was a great deal at stake, and Rachel Verinder was a nice girl. Besides which there was always the chance of the opium not having the same result the second time. Still, we will hope he was not, or, at any rate, that he has confessed to her by this time if he were.

In his more recent stories he relied perhaps too much on the introduction of the supernatural. This is generally fatal to a sensational novel. It destroys at once the sense of reality, its saving clause. Apart from this, the reader is apt to resent it. It throws out his calculations. It is no good speculating on the probable course which will appeal to the intelligence of a ghost. He feels the author is not playing fairly with him, and he does not like it. Still, for weird horror there is an early story of his, called "The Dream Woman," almost unsurpassed. It is bound up with a number of other short stories in a volume called, we believe, "The Queen of Hearts." Even if our memory is at fault, the reader will not be hard upon us. It is an admirable collection of short stories, introduced by the quaint method so dear to the Christmas serial. Did Dickens invent it in the beginning of "Nicholas Nickleby?" Sheridan le Fanu, in that extraordinary series, "In a Glass Darkly," may be more appalling, but "The Dream Woman" runs him hard.

Wilkie Collins had a considerable measure of success in writing for the stage, but it was not a success apart from his novels. His plays were simply his novels dramatized. "The New Magdalen" was probably his most successful effort; but "Armada" and "The Moonstone" both held their own amid their new surroundings,

and Mrs. Brown Potter selected "Man and Wife," adapted with great ingenuity for the stage, to make her first appearance in on the boards of the Haymarket Theatre. "Rack and Riches," his only original effort as a play, was damned. It is said to have had considerable success in America; let us hope its author got his fees. Still, it is as a novelist and not as a dramatist that Wilkie Collins will be remembered. Your true lover of novels, to whom every kind of novel is dear, provided it be good of its kind, who can love his Thackeray without quarrelling with Dickens, and can enjoy "Daniel Deronda" with still a laugh to spare for Miss Broughton, will always keep a corner of his heart and a place on his shelves for Wilkie Collins's novels. Whether his novels will be read by future generations is another matter. It is rash to prophesy what future generations will read; but this one can say with confidence, if they are not, so much the worse for future generations. If his novels do not represent the highest possible development of fiction, he did an excellent thing in a better way than any one else, and on that must rest his title to fame. As in all good books honestly written, there is a personal note in his works. All who know them will feel they have lost a friend. Those who do not may be grateful that they have before them such a rich vein of interest still unquarried.

A PROVINCIAL PLAYHOUSE FORTY YEARS AGO.

By ALICE PRICE,

AUTHOR OF "WHO IS SYLVIA?" "HILARY ST. JOHN," ETC., ETC.

IN these days when every one is offering to an amiable public his experience of the boards, his first appearance or his last, and every single item of his career, interesting or otherwise, that has intervened between these points, may it be permitted to one who was never associated with the charmed platform otherwise than as a spectator—though the said "one" felt long ago a fierce longing to get behind the footlights as "first lady," and even now confesses to an occasional hankering after an "old woman's" rôle—to record for a younger generation some of *her* experiences from the benches?

The benches! By which we mean the front row of number two, second box from the stage, whose very hard red baize-covered seat with the torturing narrow rail at the back represented Elysium to our young senses during a certain portion of the year which passed in the polite jargon of our little eastern counties' town as "the season;" five or six dissipated weeks commencing on Valentine's Day and ending with Easter.

Of course we all had our proper places in those days. All the chief families with dramatic taste affected certain boxes and certain rows, and flatly declined to sit in any other. We were very strict in the observance of that etiquette. I never knew on what scheme the allotment was originally made; I suppose like other great institutions it grew; but its rules were inviolable and we all adhered to them rigorously.

The county were up one corner, the most uncomfortable and draughty boxes in the whole auditorium, but that was not of the slightest consequence. *Noblesse oblige!* They never straggled out of that corner by any chance whatever. They would sit packed like sheep in a fold, or the male upper ten would lounge about the lobby outside, glancing now and then through the door of the box or through the little square of glass fixed in the same, or chat among themselves, loftily indifferent to the play they were patronizing, anything rather than commit themselves to less aristocratic quarters. And the town *élite* had the opposite corner, where they appeared very smartly dressed, very much at their ease and very anxious to impress upon themselves and the watching

"pit" that they were in their way quite as grand as all those patricians yonder.

Then the bachelors had a box: an inclosure that contained as much interest for some weakly feminine minds as the stage itself. The occupants thereof, professional or mercantile men mostly, unattached to playgoing families, would come dropping in as other engagements allowed them with all the nonchalance of season-ticket holders, quite agreeably conscious that their entrance sent a flutter through the bosoms of a dozen or two white-muslined misses (white book muslin was virginal full dress in those days), and even put the performers on their mettle. For these bachelors were the playhouse's steadiest patrons. In one sense I mean. I'm not going to commit myself at this distance of time to a general eulogium on their personal characters and conduct; but they were what the lessee called the backbone of the pay department, and every one took care to please them if possible. Towards the bachelors' box the tragedian would scowl his blackest. At them Othello would roll his eyes most diabolically, showing the whites in a perfectly awful manner, when, to encourage his jealous agonies, they gave him a hearty round. To them the distressed damsel wrung her powdery white hands and lifted appealing glances as she cried, "Oh, is there no one, no one here to help me?" At them the coquettish heroine of comedy sent her liveliest sallies. For their ears the tenor brought out his highest notes; for them the hero of farce improvised his local jokes, and the *danseuse* skipped her highest and pointed her satin toes *most* pointedly, for if applause came freely from that box, it was well understood that the manager grew good-humoured and the theatrical wheels would most likely roll merrily on.

Then, of course, there was the Hunt box—ours was a sporting county—and on certain nights of the season this would be filled with Reynard's enemies in pink; a delightful and dazzling sight which even eclipsed the bachelors' box near by. And there was the Tory box and—quite over the way—the Radical box, whose two sets of tenants spied at each other through opera-glasses between the acts, and made quite obviously biting remarks of a political or personal character to fill up the time; and the two country boxes well packed on market nights, and two more accorded by common social consent to the cream of the tradespeople and the smaller professionals, and in the centre of all was the Mayor's box, magisterially impartial alike in position and politics.

These boxes all crowded, the pit well packed (our own servants gazing respectfully at us from the middle), the upper boxes (a shady region we never knew much about; young men from shops with hats all on one side mostly sat in the front row), these filled somehow, and the gallery thronged to the very roof with sixpenny patrons, excited, expectant, keenly appreciative and not too noisy,

our playhouse wearing this aspect, oh! then with what enjoyment we would settle down to an evening's entertainment and how delightful it all was!

All; ah! and that "all" meant a good deal in those days.

First, we had a good fifteen minutes' performance from the local orchestra, whose good, pleasant-tempered little bald-headed conductor would appear at his desk at six forty-five (we always began at seven in those days) turn round and bow to the audience on opening and closing nights, never in between, and then lead off with all the dignity and punctuality of a Costa. Then when we had clapped him out of politeness—the orchestra was not our strong point—the eye of the manager would be distinctly visible taking a final peep at the front through a chink in the curtain, tinkle would go the little bell, up would go that curtain and the play would begin.

It was almost invariably something solid. Something in five acts (I think we would have had it in ten if we could!), Shakespeare very often on fashionable or bespeak nights, when the whole place would be crammed. A tragedy generally for the leading gentleman's benefit; then the pit would be fullest, for the pit loved tragedy in those days. "She Stoops to Conquer," or "The Rivals," when the comic gentleman was the evening's hero and wanted to figure genteelly as Tony Lumpkin, or Bob Acres; but, whatever it was, we expected it to last about two hours and a half, so that the "half-price" people, who came in at nine o'clock, got the last act at the very least.

Then followed—invariably for the first ten years of my play-going, when the custom was dropped by degrees—a sentimental song from a tenor member of the company: we never had a bass for that work. This artist would appear in front of a gorgeous drop scene with a roll of music in his hand which he seldom opened, his hair much be-curled and himself greatly got up in a rusty evening suit, though one tenor there was in quite the early part of my critical career, who instead of "When other lips, &c.," or "Don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?" used to sing "The White Squall" four nights a week, robed in a sort of foreign nautical style, consisting of a short skirt, short cloak, thick buskins and a red smoking-cap, the whole supposed, I believe, to resemble a Greek pirate.

Poor fellow! He was the unwitting cause of my first minute's pain in a playhouse. Alas! he was getting old and had been on our circuit a good many years, and had seldom varied his *répertoire*, and had never had much voice to begin with. Perhaps on the whole the audience had put up with him pretty patiently, but at last the gallery got tired of hearing the "White Squall ride on the foaming wave," and one night, when the presence of some real sailors made them a trifle noisy, they greeted our poor tenor's appearance in his nondescript get-up with lively jibes of a dis-

respectful description, told him to go and learn a new song, "they didn't want none of his white squalls; they could squall as well as him any day," and when his first agitated attempt at a high note resulted in a dismally hollow kind of croak they roared outright and drowned the orchestra as well as the singer's feeble efforts in a torrent of hisses and chaff.

In vain the boxes clapped magnanimously and the pit cried "hush;" there was no silencing the gods. The poor tenor turned ashy white under his smart stage paint. I could see him trembling as he gave up his futile effort to make himself heard and came forward to the footlights.

"Gentlemen," he said in his thin, quavering old voice, "I have tried my very best to please you for a long time, and—and——"

"You'd better leave off now," a brute called out from aloft.

The poor old aspirant for fickle favour drooped his head, smoking-cap and all—he *did* look such a pathetic old fright!—and, beckoned by a friendly hand, got off at one of the wings. The orchestra struck up the "Rats' Quadrilles;" the gallery silenced all at once as if ashamed of itself. I, like a goose, hid my face with my fan, and had surreptitiously to keep wiping tears off each side of my nose for the next half-hour, though "Box and Cox" was going on with just the most ridiculous man I ever saw in the title rôle.

Yes, "Box and Cox" was the interlude that night. And an interlude of some sort we almost always had, generally intrusted to some of the minor actors, while the principal ones rested and maybe refreshed themselves between the heavy play and the melodrama, two-act comedy or lengthy farce which had yet to follow. Sometimes the interlude was flat; then the bachelors would take themselves off *en masse* for cigars and gossip in the lower lobby, the gallery would indulge in ginger-beer and the pit cracked nuts.

We were always glad when the orchestra twanged out some well-known air; number six filled up in a twinkling, and refreshments were forgotten in the next of the evening's delights, the "comic song."

For we had always a comic song, sung by a comic gentleman, generally rather stout, in a costume mostly of large checks. "Alonzo the Brave," "Villikins and his Dinah," "The Ratcatcher's Daughter" (the air of which, by the way, taken slowly in a sympathetic key, is as charming as anything one could wish), Hood's "Mary's Ghost"—a tremendous favourite that!—were included in this artist's list, and the whole house, even the polite boxes, used to enjoy them hugely, never letting the singer off without an encore, and grudgingly stopping their applause even when the drop scene (a classic hall with Corinthian pillars—so appropriate for a comic song, but that never struck any of us) was rung up and the whole stage was left visible, to be occupied at the first chord

from the orchestra by a fairy in short skirts and satin slippers and an enchanting and perpetual smile.

In those days that feature of the evening, the dance, was never omitted. I don't think we ever had any one very celebrated in my time, though I listened hungrily to traditions of one visit from Madame Vestris years before. Our *danseuses* were mostly Mademoiselles Katies or Rosies, but their skippings and twirlings were always received as an agreeable diversity, and their feats, especially in going round and round without getting dizzy, also in walking about on the extreme tips of their toes with their arms gracefully curved before them, filled *one* young person with such envy that I know she made herself perfectly bilious and wore out an unlawful amount of patent slippers in secret and, alas! vain attempts at emulating their delightful dexterity.

After our terpsichorean ten minutes we had our concluding piece, not a frivolous *soufflé* of a thing over in fifteen minutes, but a good well-established favourite, lasting close on an hour-and-a-half, about the enjoyment of which there was a dash of melancholy, for that was the end!

But we all made a point of stopping to the very last syllable. It was not "good form" then-a-days to bustle and chatter and wrap up and troop off during the final five minutes, when the entanglements of the play are being unravelled and the lovers are all being blessed. When the green curtain began to descend, not before, did the county arise and depart with dignity to their waiting carriages, bowed downstairs by the boxkeeper and respectfully smirked at from the stage door by the released manager. Then followed the lesser luminaries of the audience in "flys," or if they lived close by, scuttling off afoot in galoshes and miraculous headwraps. Meantime the *omnium gatherum* arrayed themselves in a queer curve-shaped cloak-room, pinned their white muslins up out of possible mud, put their caps or vast ornamentations of ribbons and flowers into little round baskets, and walked off homeward all serenely conscious of having had an excellent three shillings' worth of amusement in the last four hours.

So much for us. Now whom out of those far-off days can I remember best the other side of the footlights?

As early as any comes forward the tall figure of a man, elderly then, portly by nature and rendered more portly by art as he personified "young Harry's" boon companion, jovial, swaggering "Jack Falstaff." That was Henry Wallack, and how handsome he was with his keen flashing eyes, aquiline nose, silvery hair, perfect teeth, and complexion delicate as any woman's, spite of his sixty years or more. No courtlier Sir Peter Teazle than he was ever coaxed and cozened by a young stage wife, and his "Grandfather Whitehead" many people pronounced equal to Farren's. But, spite of personal gifts in abundance and considerable ability, Henry Wallack never made much mark on the English stage. In America he

prospered better, though even there he never attained anything like the popularity of his brother James, with whom he sometimes worked on the other side of the Atlantic, but seldom made his engagements profitable enough to bring much grist back to the home mill.

That was kept going at the time I write of by his wife, a beautiful woman whose life reads like a romance.

The daughter of a Liverpool merchant, Maria Turpin, after being brought up in wealth and rejecting more than one suitor who could have kept her in affluence, found herself while yet a girl left penniless in the world through her father's failure in trade. By the kindness of friends her great gift of music received training in London, which enabled her to earn her own living—and largely that of her mother also—by operatic engagements. In one of these she met and married Henry Wallack, who was then double her age and the father of children as old as herself.

Possessing a rare and singularly lasting loveliness and delightful though not very powerful voice, Maria Wallack was yet wanting in that force and play of character required for an actress. Upon the boards she was always an elegant woman and a sweet singer, but nothing beyond. Her "Ophelia" was a tender impersonation of Hamlet's luckless heroine, but she would never have dreamed of importing into the part the subtleties, the flashes, the intensely crazy craziness with which it is interpreted nowadays.

After her three children's birth (they have all been dead these twenty years) this gentle and accomplished woman settled for several years in the town I write of, finding the lion's share towards the maintenance of her small home by unflagging industry in every branch of her art. She made many friends, high and low, for she had great powers of personal fascination, and these stood her in good stead when various circumstances necessitated her moving to wider spheres. Much suffering made the work she was compelled to carry on to the end of her days very hard, but those who employed her waning powers grew deeply attached to her, and her last days were cheered by their generous kindness.

Let me apologize for the gravity of this little bit of biography. Having been one of Maria Wallack's devoted and admiring pupils may be accepted as my excuse for it.

Another name afterwards very widely known is associated in my memory with a young lady in white satin, up one corner of the stage wildly crying, "That voice! 'Tis he! 'Tis Claud!" and then the time-honoured rush of Melnotte and his once haughty bride into each other's arms amid uproarious applause. The same artist was also the vivacious "Miss Hardcastle," in the same season, and I remember hearing the performer's father (lessee of our theatre for the time being) had to repress too pronounced attentions to his pretty daughter and ward off the breaking of heads on

her account. Long ago, I believe, this Miss Fanny Davenport fulfilled her early promise of success by establishing herself firmly in the affections of our American cousins.

Another artist who quite turned my young head, and I daresay the heads of a good many who were old enough to know better, was the father of the fair lady who has since served the same process on countless numbers in English society.

James Anderson was the first and most perfect representative of that superb barbarian Ingomar whom I have ever seen. His stage presence was magnificent, and the play suited him up to the hilt. Ah, how I did envy Parthenia her rôle! I cannot remember who had it, but I distinctly recollect considering her not equal to her work, and fancying with the naïve conceit of a critic just in her teens that one—ah-m—among the audience could have done it ampler justice!

This gentleman was of course a "star;" it goes without saying he was not a member of our regular six weeks' company, although here I may add that this company did actually at one time include a "walking gentleman" with a promising voice who has since made that voice heard in all parts of the world as the first and finest of English tenors; and a "walking lady" of but small histrionic powers, who, wisely discarding the boards for the pen, has since delighted thousands of the British public with thirty or forty clever novels, with "more to follow in due succession!"

Yes, Mr. Anderson was a star of the first magnitude. So was Miss Vandenhoff, that genial and thorough-going actress, who, after breaking all our hearts one night in "The Stranger," ran the risk of killing us with laughter half-an-hour later over an unpremeditated blunder in a little farce, "The Day after the Wedding," I think it was. Here the bride winds up a string of reproaches at her husband by telling him he ought to "fly to fetch her a needle from Birmingham, bear's grease from the North Pole, or—a pound of green cheese from the moon," she *should* have said, instead of which, in the torrent of her wrath, "A pound of green *moon* from the *cheese*," cried Miss Vandenhoff, and the whole house, actors, audience and herself, were so convulsed with laughter that it was fully five minutes before order was restored, the heroine able to speak again, or any of us to listen.

Among other red letter nights of that period come two when the Charles Keans honoured our stage by appearing upon it, and then again, though I'm afraid it's *infra dig.* to confess it, the cream of the entertainment to my mind lay in the second piece, when, after Mr. Kean had kept all our brains on the stretch following his profound study of that crafty old wretch Louis the Eleventh's character, he appeared with Mrs. Kean in the "Jealous Wife." Never is that perfect actress and most charming lady to be forgotten by those who had the luck to see her then. Her naturalness, her own vivid enjoyment of the part, her delightfully

appropriate, but most ridiculous dress—bright yellow satin with enormous grass-coloured rosettes stuck inconsequentially about it, even on the toes of her little high-heeled slippers—her entire self-abandonment to the green-eyed monster, the way in which she sat down in a paroxysm of suspicious rage and beat those little feet upon the floor and screamed like any wilful baby in a passion, only pausing for breath and to gasp out, "Don't you hear me, Charles?" at her tormented spouse, who, half frenzied, dashed up and down with clenched fists and dapper little legs in knee breeches and silk stockings, and shoes with huge buckles, and a powdered wig with a neat pigtail, and an expression of exasperated misery on his countenance enough to upset the risible muscles of a saint—all this formed an hour of such fun as does one good to remember a whole life through. At any rate, one of that gifted couple's audience has to thank them for a "merry memory," which has often shot out of the background of time to enliven a duller mood in later days.

Quite distinct, though, from the excited delight afforded by the visits of these illustrious artists was the steady-going amusement one of our last managers and lessees always offered us in his own person.

Charles Gill will be well recollected by scores of eastern counties playgoers, and deserves to be recollected too. He was an old man when I knew him, but by aid of a fresh colour, a most sleek ginger-tinted wig, lovely false teeth, very careful dressing and a jaunty step, might have passed for ten or fifteen years below his actual age. From an extremely subordinate position on the boards—he used to be proud of telling his friends that he had begun life as a scene-shifter—he had by unflagging industry and perseverance raised himself to be commander-in-chief of the company, and trained himself to be an actor of considerable power and versatility.

"Old Gill," as I fear we all irreverently called him thirty years ago, was greatest in comic parts. His quavering trepidation as Bob Acres was a great joke. His weebegone countenance, long lank hair and ragged get-up when as Billy Barlow, in the "Illustrious Stranger," he has been cast by the waves on a desert island and sits astride a hen-coop (likewise cast up by the waves), lamenting his dismal fate, was a sight to see. The exquisitely ludicrous touch when, preposterously made up as White Moll in "Sir Roger de Coverley," he entered his protest against doing violence to captured travellers with, "Oh, don't let us have any murder. It makes such a *n-a-r-sty* mess," was peculiarly his own. But he had also great capabilities for a more serious style, though chance maybe had given him but little opportunity of cultivating these.

Once for his benefit—Ah, those benefits! When we all took tickets whether we wished for them or no rather than disappoint the poor actors, and used to be rewarded for our magnanimity by

something very special! A real meal perhaps, with *bonâ fide* things to eat and drink. Actual ale in clear crystal, visibly swallowed, instead of a long draught of nothingness out of a wooden goblet, used to rouse the admiration of the gallery, while a dish of steaming hot potatoes and a shilling'sworth of three-cornered tartlets woke plaudits from every part of the house! But to return.—Once on "Old Gill's" benefit he essayed a tragic part and did it with quite extraordinary and unexpected force. The name of the drama I have lost, but the realistic agony of the hero in his self-inflicted death by charcoal suffocation none who saw it are likely to forget. We were all fascinated and rather frightened. I think the actor himself shared our feelings, and was as relieved as his crowded audience when after the usual half-hour's singing and dancing he reappeared and stalked about the stage in vast top boots and martial attire, and his own inimitably droll style as Bombastes Furioso.

It was during Charles Gill's rule that we had the questionable pleasure of seeing more than one lady attempt the part of Hamlet. That was a treat usually reserved for a benefit, and it generally attracted a surging pit, who had not then been educated into despising the traditional representation of Denmark's prince in deeply funeral attire with—I should say—several pounds' worth of black ostrich feathers gracefully waving from a Duchess-of-Devonshire-shaped beaver hat.

We ourselves had no great admiration for the female adoption of the character, though we generally shed upon it the light of our countenance just to encourage the leading lady. Of course I need not say that our properties were poor indeed compared with those which the public expect and generally get nowadays, but we had one scene of which we were all extremely proud. It was a "drop," a background, and was reputed to have been painted an unknown number of years previously by an artist since risen to a lofty pinnacle of fame. Our manager always adverted to it with pride in his speech on the opening night. We usually clapped when it was mentioned, and we certainly made the most of it, using it on every possible occasion. It had a cottage, a church with a spire, and some sheep in it, a winding river, some pastoral slopes and a setting sun. It was just a placid view of—say a Suffolk parish, but it boldly figured as the "Forest of Arden," with the melancholy Jacques meditating in front of it; as "Bosworth Field," with Richard the Third scowling and writhing in the foreground; as "View in Italy," with Romeo and Juliet parting at break of day; as "Scene at Homburg," "Scene in the Backwoods," "Scene in Scotland," or "Scene in the Garden of Mr. Smith." For all these our pretty drop would occupy the rear of the stage, and we in front accepted it always, quite satisfied with its change of name, and never fashed ourselves one bit over any small accompanying incongruities.

Oh dear, but I suppose those were days of crass ignorance, such as our children would scoff at, but they owned a lustre present times have lost.

I know I went, not so very long ago, but it was in August—imagine the change that date implies—and saw at my old theatre a company which was perambulating the provinces, bestowing a fifteen minutes' *lever de rideau* and a comedy translated from the French, a couple of nights at each town. No comic song. No sentimental song. No dance, and no farce! And, alas! I shouldn't have known our dear old house. A metamorphosis as terrible as that wrought in some ecclesiastical buildings had been carried out. Though it had not been "restored" it had been "done up." The tragic and the comic muse right and left of our old tarnished gilt pillars had been painted out. A smart new curtain went up and down sideways. The company had brought their own scenery. I inquired of the boxkeeper with heart-sinking, what had become of the celebrated drop of thirty years ago.

He stared at me. "Didn't know there'd ever been such a property. Now there wasn't no regular season, there wasn't no regular boxkeeper. As for him he was strange to the place."

Strange! I should think he was, and so were everything and every one else.

Tradespeople lounged about the county box. The bachelors as a body were nowhere. Tories and Radicals were jumbled up anyhow. Half the pit had been turned into stalls, and nearly all of them were empty.

Third-rate London artists occupied the stage, but they seemed languidly indifferent to the applause of their thin audience. No one seemed to take the least personal interest in the players, and I came away despondently from my old haunt of enjoyment fervently wishing I had not gone at all. How everything had deteriorated since I was young.

But then, to be sure, the thirty years between that time and this may have had something to do with my depressing ultimatum!

IN 1875.

By GERALDINE BUTT.

ONE hears a good deal about soldiers' sons, and their hereditary courage and splendid virtues ; but one does not hear so much, as a rule, about the soldier's daughter, and yet I have known some who had a fine courage too.

For instance, there was Anna Jane Austen, who was the daughter of the colour-sergeant of my company in '75, when we were at Fyzabad. I have often thought of the fearlessness and indomitable courage of that girl, and should like to put it in writing, only everything I write now has the flavour of an official report—and by official reports my life has been embittered.

Anna Jane's courage was, doubtless, hereditary too ; for her mother was one of those people who are born without fear, and sail calmly through life, leaving terror and desolation behind them. She frightened Austen terribly, though he used to pretend he liked it, and spoke jauntily about "Me and the missus having a few words." He never allowed that it went beyond words ! Anna Jane was never frightened at her mother. She used to stand on one leg, in a way peculiar to herself and the adjutant (I mean the *bird*), with her head a little bent, and her hair tossing in her eyes, whilst Mrs. Austen talked—and oh ! how she *could* talk !—and then, all of a sudden, Anna Jane would throw back her hair, and drop her leg, and raise her dark, clear eyes, and say quite quietly, "'A done, mother ; a' done, I say," and there was an end of it. Mrs. Austen speechless, Austen limp and tired, and Anna Jane triumphant.

When the cholera broke out amongst our men in April, the women and children were ordered off to the hills, and then for the first time we knew of what stuff Anna Jane was made. During the week of preparation she was always in the hospital. Bolts and bars, apothecaries and doctors could not keep her out ; for, an hour after an ignominious eviction, there would be the slight little figure again, tripping steadily up between the rows of beds, the bright dark eyes glancing warily from side to side.

The men liked having her, for she was born a nurse, and she fought the terrible disease as if it had been a living foe, but, on the fourth night, little Gordon, one of the band boys died, and when the doctor came in a hurry back to the bed he had only left

ten minutes before, Anna Jane was there before him, kneeling at the bed's head, with the poor lad's wasted cheek against her own.

He tried to speak sternly, but he broke down, when Anna Jane's soft voice broke the silence. "But for me he'd have been alone, sir," she said, and she laid his head back upon the pillow and went quietly away.

"This will never do," said Dr. Macrae again; "but at any rate it's only for another twenty-four hours. You are all off to the hills to-morrow."

"Yes, sir," she said meekly.

"I wonder what devilment that girl is up to now," said Macrae to me when we got outside; "she is never as quiet as that unless there's insubordination working in her brain. I'm sorry to lose her, too—very; she's the best nurse I ever saw, quite without fear. She never thinks of herself."

The next day there were eight more men of my company down, and three deaths. I spent all day in hospital, and Macrae was walked off his legs, but he expected a little more peace when the women and children had started. Anna Jane was in and out of the tents all day, working, soothing, nursing, with all the calmness and courage of an experienced woman; but at seven o'clock she put on her hat and walked deliberately down between the rows of beds with a determined face. I called out as she passed to say good-bye, and Evans, who was in the bed beside me, looked after her wistfully, but she took no notice of either of us. Over Evans's face a look of disappointment flitted, and I leant over him.

"She is only a child, Evans," I said; "she doesn't think; she doesn't know that she leaves a blank."

Evans turned his wan eyes full upon me and spoke hoarsely.

"She's a coming back, sir," he said.

I was afraid to contradict him, as I thought he was wandering, so I said nothing, but went back to my weary task in that dreadful tent.

Evans was about as bad as he could be, but there were so many as bad as he that one could only go from bed to bed and do the little one could, and so for almost an hour I plodded on.

I was leaning over Brown, feeling his fluttering pulse and watching for "the turn" Macrae always hoped for, when, behind me, I heard a sound like the ghost of a laugh. It seemed years since any one had laughed, so I looked round hastily to see what was up, and, for one quick moment, nearly every head was raised.

Evans had lifted himself up and was looking at the raised curtain in the doorway, and there—standing in the shadow, with the dull, sickly light of the lamp falling on her hair—stood Anna Jane!

She came swiftly up between the beds, looking very tall in her short frock, and with her charming face lighted up with a pretty smile. When she was close to Macrae, she dropped a courtesy.

"I've come to stay," she said.

"Has the train gone?" he asked, looking her all over.

"Yes, sir," she said demurely. "I waited until it was off."

"And I suppose," he said, speaking as calmly as she did, "that you are prepared to have your hair cut and spend seven days in cells?"

"As you please, sir," she answered indifferently.

But the long and the short of it was that she stayed, and very thankful we were to have her.

I cannot write anything about the dreadful weeks that followed. Some have experienced them, and some, please God, will never know how much it is possible to bear—and live. But we who went through it will certainly never forget all that we owe to Anna Jane Austen. She was a child when it began, but it seemed as if she grew to womanhood in a night, so patient was she, so gentle, and above all so strong.

It was refreshing to turn from the ghastly faces of the men to the tall, straight young figure in the black dress that she always wore, crowned with the red-brown hair, brushed back now under a prim cap. It could not make her look older, but it made her look more serious, and that pleased her.

It is no use my running on like this. When once I begin to write of Anna Jane, words seem too poor and weak to express my thoughts; but it sometimes seemed to me as if the rough brown hair might have been a halo. As to the men, she was their idol.

But at last it was all over. We stood and breathed again and looked around us, and everywhere it seemed as if the world was full of graves.

The red sun shone low upon the wooden crosses by the cholera camp the day the men were marched back to barracks, and Anna Jane stood by my side for a minute at the tent door, shading her eyes and looking back.

For the first time I saw her lips quiver, and when she spoke it was huskily.

"I cannot bear to leave them here alone," she said.

As if ashamed of her emotion she walked away, her slight figure looking very tall in the twilight. Presently she hesitated, turned, and came back.

Macrae had come out and joined me. She went straight up to him and looked into his face with the clear eyes that seemed to see through you.

"Will you please send me to the hills now, sir?" she said.

"Are you not afraid of your mother?" he asked, answering her question with another.

She glanced up and then down again.

"I'm not father," she said disdainfully.

And so she went.

The only reason I have for fancying that Anna Jane married Evans, the quartermaster-sergeant of the 207th, is that, about a week ago, a fellow told me he had seen and spoken to a Mrs. Evans in that regiment, who told him she had been through the cholera at Fyzabad in '75, and it was not so bad as people imagined. She said she knew a captain in the — Lancers, whose name was Allison, and I fancy she meant me.

Urquhart said that she had very clear beautiful eyes and very untidy hair.

DEAD LEAVES IN THE PARK.

By ARTHUR T. PASK.

WHAT a detestable greyness! The grass is grey; the sheep are a very dirty grey; the road is grey; the sky is grey. A grey-haired groom is trotting sulkily past on a grey mare. I am walking in the Park. A pleasant easterly breeze is sending an agreeable supply of road grit down my collar. I look over at the houses in Park Lane. The shutters are all closed. No bright-faced butcher's boy with shining morning face, and head with mutton fat adorned, ogleth the maid in the attic. No beauty, fresh with the capricious graces of her first season, mounts her slim hack and trots off southwards. No rolling past of barouche, landau, victoria. Vanity Fair on wheels seems to have utterly departed. It is too cold to sit down under the trees here. It is too dull, too grey, too wintry, too deserted, to think even, pleasantly and comfortably. What? A gleam of sunlight through the clouds. *Eh bien*, at any rate it mends matters a little, if only a very little. See how it falls on the scarlet coat of the Guardsman walking away towards the Magazine. A fat London sparrow, too, looking as if he were living on good out-of-season board wages, begins to chirrup lustily. A cat, who has strayed from the be-hollanded, covered-up glories of Mayfair, gazes at him and licks her thin lips. From the shady grove of the distant mews comes the note of the piano-organ, "Queen of my heart to-night." Alas, the mournful strain of reminiscence it wakens in my luckless heart! A puff of wind carries a company of dead leaves down the road. They are vanished like my hopes of thee, my——. Well, well, well, no more of that. She is wedded to another, and I am all alone with a two years' tailor's bill to pay and a wine account, and a feeling that I should like to be off to the Riviera, only it can't be managed anyhow.

Dead leaves in the Park. They flutter listlessly through the dried grass. They whisper together in little nooks beneath the smoke-clad trunks of the elms. They collect by the legs of blistered seats, where but a few months ago fashion gossiped and scandal wagged and soft vows were made, and mothers scowled at their charges for smiling at the detrimental. Here, too, in these now deserted groves walked the blushing, peach-cheeked little damsel from the provinces, who shrieked with delight, "Here comes

the Princess!" But I have heard of late that the provincial cousiness thinks a great deal more of herself than ever did her predecessors. Young ladies from Birmingham especially affect even a perfect contempt of the Great City. They boast that they can tennis and geologize and sing and play (anything from the *Nympe de Diane* to the particular melody that was played by the immortal flautist before the Hebrew patriarch). They affect even an American smartness, and will soon be able to chatter as shrilly and as volubly as the liveliest daughter of Columbia, whose father made his pile at something or the other, and could not rest content until his highly-cultivated offspring wedded with the strawberry leaves. Why years ago, when pretty, prim little damsels worked samples and ate syllabubs, and said, "La, you, now!" a visit to London was an event in one's lifetime to be marked with a red stone. Do you remember that charming bit in "*The Virginians*" of Miss Hetty and her sister coming to London town with kind papa, the general, to stop at my lord's? I wonder what little rural-bred maidens feel any particular ravishment now in entering the metropolis for the first time in their lives. Mademoiselle, I *am* an old fogey, but let me tell you keep a little corner somewhere or the other for a stock of unsophistications (I wonder if there is such a word?). It is really pleasant, let me tell you, to come across something as an absolutely new experience, whether in modes or in morals.

How cold the wind is! It positively creeps under my shirt cuffs. It sighs through the branches of the trees. No, I will *not* walk down the Row; it would give me such a dose of the horrors that I shouldn't get over it for a twelvemonth. I shall walk across the Green Park into the Mall. How I miss the dear old arch with the Iron Duke atop. Of course it was artistically absurd, but don't we always like most the things that are absurd and not right for us? Don't you, sir, persist over and over again in drinking Chambertin; you know it's utterly absurd and death and gout to you, and what not, yet you do it all the same, and like it a great deal better than if Sir Dentatus Squills had said to you, "*Always* drink Chambertin." A few sheep are browsing in the Park, and their bells are supposed to make quite a rural tinkling. Bah! there's a great deal more muffins than meadows in the suggestion. A wet sail and a flowing sheet and a wind that follows fast; a black sheep on a grazing slope and a nursemaid wheeling past—with a great wretch of a Guardsman walking beside her.

Well, here I am in the Mall now. How grim it all looks! The other day I saw an oleograph of Charles the First marching through the Mall on his way to Whitehall. Now this self-same Mall I always do like, winter or summer. When Rowley strolled with his spaniels and sultanas—or I forget, his sacred Majesty Charles the Second was rather a brisk walker than otherwise—he cared a great deal for his own constitution, though, faith, little enough for

that Mr. Hallam wrote his famous history of. And Dutch William's Guards, too, marching down to take care of my Lord Macaulay's pet aversion! However, you needn't think I'm going to crib from Thornbury's London, or Pepys', or Horace Walpole or any one else. I like the Mall well enough to prevent me quoting any old-world nonsense about it. It's frightfully chilly, too, and the leaves go dancing over the grass in the wind. There they go towards the lake—there they go skimming in among the ducks. By these waters of Babylon I feel inclined to sit down and weep the departure of almost every one. I suppose that duck's a companionable creature that comes swimming towards me; he notes my humour melancholic; although he has a beak his head is of the sympathetic character. Come hither, little friend; let no dreaded thought of green peas or winter salad (I would not give a rap for duckling without salad) hinder thee from coming to me to mingle the tear of sympathy. He has swam away. Perdition and the coarsest sage and onion seize thee, faithless creature! On the water a small boy has launched a toy cutter. It flies bravely over the ripples. A fond father and mother gaze at his boyish eagerness. I wonder what that boy will grow up to be. He may be a bishop or a fraudulent bank director. His papa and mamma—you can see it plainly in their faces—have made up their minds that he will be a choice compound of Alexander the Great, Byron (minus his naughtiness), Bishop Heber, Vanderbilt, Nelson and the Prince of Wales. To think that such a bright-faced, sunny-hearted little lad should degenerate into miserable middle-class respectability—bald-headed rotundity of boring platitudes. 'Tis very sad to think of. It might be a positive act of public beneficence to kill that child as he stands. Think of how awful he may be in his old age; the dreadful long-winded yarns he will tell, the columns of Polonius-like advice he will crush his young relatives with. "When I was a boy"—"My dear child, I have lived a long life and never yet"—"The greatest folly that youth can be guilty of." Really, now, I have half a mind to take that boy on to the bridge and drop him into the water. It might be a charity to mankind to do it. Who can tell? The child runs towards me. Why, bless my heart alive, it's my nephew Jack.

"I want a shillin', uncle, to buy a rat-trap."

"Certainly, my love."

The sun has come out again. Dear me, how much brighter everything looks!

The wind seems to have swept all the Dead Leaves from the Park.

A LEGEND OF LOWER BRITTANY.

THE spire looms dark in the wintery light,
Though the tower is high, and the church is white,
For on Christmas Eve a dark'ning cloud
Enwraps the scene in a dreary shroud.

Near to the church is a little abode,
And to it there winds a rough little road ;
There are four little windows, and one little door,
And within is a savour of priestly lore.

The villagers all are gone to their rest,
And the wind it blows a gale from the west,
Pit-pat go the drops of the rain, as it flops
Down from the trees and the small house-tops ;
And the hurricane whistles its way through the trees,
And the howl of the wolf is borne on the breeze,
Whilst owls that shriek in their nightly freak,
Are welcoming loudly the Christmas week.

Who is it that rides through the little lane
Without a stirrup, without a rein,
On a lumbering, clattering Breton bay,
Catch the galloping beggar, who may ?
At the little white house he at length pulls up ;
Is it for bit ? or is it for sup ?
Is it for something short ? or does he
Feel sick, or sad, or only muzzy ?

But look we within the little house door ;
I see a face, and I hear a snore,
And the face is round, and the snore is loud,
And the owner has just been blowing a cloud,
Whilst a clerical hat is put on awry,
Not rakish, but only jauntily.

Sudden a voice salutes his ear,
A voice that is both loud and clear ;
"Awake ! Awake !
"A soul's at stake ;
"Minutes are short, and time is flying ;
"Delay not a moment : the lady's dying !"

Slowly he rises up from his chair,
And adjusts his priestly hat with care,
And gathering his *soutane* around his knees,
He bids his housekeeper mind the keys.

But who is the lady that's taken so ill
She cannot swallow her draughts and pill,
And can only groan through the live-long day,
And beg that the *curé* will come and pray?

Alas! her religion's been none of the best;
Full rarely she's fasted, and never confess'd;
In short, her behaviour's been rather so, so,
And she always said "Yes" when she ought to say "No."

Through mud and through mire,
Through brake and through briar,
On speeds the priest on his little dun mare,
And she never so much as turns a hair.

"He's there,

"I declare!"

Says the little *soubrette*;

"I hope your reverence isn't wet."

Then to the holy man curtseying low,
She takes him—with a smile—in tow.

Behind the door he tarries a space
To learn the pros and cons of the case;
Then mounting the stairs with a heavy tread,
He sits him down beside the bed.

He asks the lady if she's better,
And remarks that the night could not be wetter.
Then rememb'ring his duty is to condole,
He proceeds to inquire after her soul.

The words are said,

When from the bed

Arises a form all black and red,

With a forkèd tongue, and a foot all cleft,

And a tail that waggles from right to left,

Whilst a vicious look is in his eye,

And the *soubrette* shrieks out a loud "Oh, my!

And the priest for a moment is taken aback,

And can only exclaim, "Good lack! Good lack!"

But good Father Migeote is not to be done,
A soul has yet to be lost or won;

He calls on St. Michael, St. Giles and St. Anne,
And invokes Saints Gudule and Athelstane ;
But all in vain.
With might and main,
With tweak and with pain,
Again and again,
The devil asserts his right to possess
The soul of the lady who wouldn't confess.

But all of a sudden the father bethought him
Of the little black book that he carried about him ;
'Twas a book that only the priests may see
And not allowed to the laity ;
But amongst its uses both good and wise,
(And this no Catholic ever denies),
Is, with a holy word and blow,
To send off the devil when he's *de trop*.

So the book right stoutly, the father hurls
At the head of his foe, and away he whirls
In a flash and a blaze,
And a sort of a haze,
While the lady is left in a great amaze.

But after a time she receives absolution,
And takes a good dose of soothing solution,
Whilst the *soubrette* she puts the bed to rights,
And there's left but a smell of Promethean lights,
Which causes the father to hold his nose,
As slowly he leaves the room on his toes.

But whether the lady lived or not,
Or sinned again, and the father forgot,
And whether Old Nick,
Who cut his stick,
For fear of St. Albert's book, ever came back
In his devilish costume of red and black,
I cannot tell ; but great is the glory
His reverence has gained by his share in the story.
And after this happened, for many a day,
Whenever the devil is mentioned, they say
The villagers always are ready to shout
For the cheery old *curé* who bowled him out.

"SHEBA."

A STUDY OF GIRLHOOD.

By "RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "DAME DURDEN," "DARBY AND JOAN," "THE LADY NANCY,"
"GRETCHEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER L.

"THE BRUISED REED."

MRS. LEVISON lay on the couch in what she liked to call "her boudoir," in a state of misery, physical pain, and terror, that can best be described as "abject."

For some months past she had declared herself to be out of health—an announcement which her husband received with scorn and incredulity.

"You are too stout, you ought to take more exercise," he said. But Mrs. Levison knew that the stoutness was unnatural, and that the exercise if attempted was a painful and laboured exertion. She had at last sent for a doctor, the best that Sydney could boast of, and the result of his opinion was the terror and misery just described.

It is a curious fact that human beings who are face to face with the chances and perils of death all their lives, never realize that he has an individual claim upon their attention until that claim is forced upon them by some special warning.

That warning had come to Mrs. Levison—come suddenly and without preparation. True, there was no immediate danger, but if within six months she did not undergo an operation, her life would be seriously threatened.

An operation! Mrs. Levison heard the dread words and shrieked with horror. Then she declared she would rather die than undergo it; . . . next that if she *did* undergo it, she would only trust herself to the known skill of an English surgeon, and would go back to her native land by the very next mail.

For a month she had gone on in this manner until Mr. Levison really did not know what to make of her. When he heard how serious the illness was, he declared himself perfectly willing to take her to England, but when she heard that, she would not make up her mind to go. No: . . . she might get worse . . . she

might die on the voyage. . . . Better remain where she was than be buried at sea. She could only rest in consecrated ground.

When matters were in this state, Allison Saxton came back to Sydney, her brother having gone to a wild and unfrequented part of South Australia, where he could not take the girls. Naturally, she went to see Mrs. Levison—more to glean some news of Sheba than because she wished to renew the acquaintance of her mother. When she found Mrs. Levison in such a critical and miserable condition, her natural kindness of heart prompted her to visit her as often as was possible, and after a time she even induced the invalid to see Noel Hill.

In truth, Mrs. Levison's mind had become almost subjective—for her—and she was ready to accept any possible consolation. She clung to Allison Saxton with almost desperate tenacity. Her calm sweet face, her gentle voice, the peace and steadfastness of her nature were just the attractions Mrs. Levison herself lacked, and now began dimly to appreciate. No doubt she was ill, very ill, and her mind began to lose its hold of earthly vanities, and to see the purposelessness of gold, and luxury, and fine clothing, once the end of life threw its prophetic shadow over the external gloss and beauty which had deluded her senses.

No one can contemplate the approach of death without a shock, let them be ever so confident as to their own deserts in the next life, or so full of trust in the oft quoted (and little understood) merits of a Divine sacrifice. As long as that "end" is an abstract thing, lending itself to philosophical discussion—a possibility far off and scarcely realized in any personal sense, they feel comparatively brave, but once let the chill of approaching doom, the knowledge of the pronounced fiat come straight and sure to individual consciousness, and the bravery is found to be only assumed—a poor comfortless pretence from which the soul shrinks, and at which the heart quakes.

Mrs. Levison had always been an obstinate, prejudiced, and assertive woman. A woman greatly given to believe in the superiority of her own virtues, and the excellence of her own judgment.

It had never seemed possible to her that she could be visited by such a misfortune as now threatened her, and at times she even felt called upon to declare that the doctor must be mistaken, that a disease such as he described could not possibly have taken hold of her; but when other advice was called in and the opinion was still the same, she grew terrified and submissive, and in this mood she was ready to do anything and believe anything that would atone for the errors and omissions of this life, and serve as a safe passport of admission to the next.

* * * *

One chilly autumn evening Miss Saxton was sitting by the side

of the invalid in her own luxurious room. She had been very ill all day, and pain had left her weak and exhausted. For some time the two women had sat silently there in the gathering dusk, their thoughts absent and pre-occupied.

Mrs. Levison spoke at last. "I cannot understand," she said, "what made Noel Hill start off to Melbourne in that extraordinary fashion. I wish he would come back."

"He only went for a fortnight to take a friend's duty," said Aunt Allison soothingly. "He will soon be back now."

"A fortnight," murmured Mrs. Levison in her weak complaining voice. "How long it seems. How much I miss him. Ah, if I had had such a son. Hex does not care a rap for any one. He is a mass of selfishness. He never comes to inquire after me, or see me, and after all I have done for him I did expect a little gratitude in return. Ah me! I have never had any comfort in my children. Look at Sheba. Not a word—not a line since she married. At least she might have written to say where she was, and if she was happy."

"She did not like to write, I expect," said Miss Saxton. "She knew how averse you were to her husband. You told me you had said you would never allow him to set foot in your house."

"Yes, I did. But sometimes I have thought I was too hasty. I remember what he said about his family, that he was of really good birth, as good as Count Pharamond's. If that was true . . . if some day he inherited a title or an estate in England, I should like to feel I had forgiven them, and that we were reconciled."

Miss Saxton could not restrain a smile of amusement at this naive declaration. Fortunately, the dusk hid it. She bent forward and stirred the fire into a blaze. "Shall I ring for lights?" she said.

"Not just yet," answered Mrs. Levison. "Stay—surely that was the bell; . . . who can it be? . . . perhaps Noel Hill has returned."

Allison Saxton rose and went to the door and opened it. "Yes," she said, "it is his step. He is speaking to some one—now he is coming here. Will you see him?"

"Of course I will see him. Ask him in at once."

She rose from her pillow, and held out her hands eagerly to the young man as he advanced towards her. Miss Saxton looked at him keenly. She thought the change to Melbourne, and the sea trip had certainly not benefited his health. He looked pale, and worn, and haggard, as a man looks who has borne some long strain of mental anxiety. She closed the door and took her old place beside the bright wood fire. She left Noel Hill to do the talking, knowing that Mrs. Levison dearly loved manly sympathy and condolence.

But Noel Hill seemed strangely absent and silent. It seemed

an effort to him to collect his thoughts, or talk connectedly for two minutes together.

"What is the matter, Mr. Hill?" asked Allison Saxton at last. "Have you met with any trouble or misfortune since you left Sydney—or was the sea too unkind to you? I know you are not the best sailor in the world."

He started almost nervously. . . . "The sea," he said—"yes . . . I had a bad passage . . . it was terribly rough—but you are right, Miss Saxton, something is troubling me. Since I left here I have learnt the sad fate of—of a very dear friend. The history altogether is so tragic and terrible that I cannot think of it calmly; it is the history of a woman's dream of mortal happiness broken short by one of those terrible accidents we call 'fatality.'"

Mrs. Levison leant back on her pillows and applied herself to her smelling-salts. "Will you tell it to us?" she said—"that is to say if it is not too sad. My nerves are so shattered by my own terrible sufferings that I cannot bear to hear of horrors."

"I think," said the young clergyman, "you ought to hear—this; if only to show you what others have to suffer and endure."

He came over towards the fire, and leaning one arm against the mantelpiece began his story:

"The night before I left Melbourne," he said, "I had been called to see a sick person living on the outskirts of the town. I was returning home when by some mischance I missed my way, and never noticed it until I found myself nearing the river." I stopped to take my bearings. Suddenly I saw a dark figure flit out from the shadows of the trees, and glide swiftly down towards the banks. It looked so strange, so eerie—that I will confess to a momentary feeling of fear. As I watched—the arms were upraised—a dark covering fell to the ground. Before me I saw a woman clothed in some white loose drapery. She looked up to the sky . . . then, without sound—without warning, she flung herself headlong into the swift, dark water. For a second or two I was so paralyzed with horror I could not move. Then—I rushed forwards. . . . I saw something white floating a short distance off . . . in a moment I was in the water, too, and striking out in the direction . . . When I reached the spot the woman had sunk again. She rose once more—I seized the floating garments—how I got her to land I cannot tell. God gave me strength even as He must have directed my steps there to that spot . . ."

"You—you saved her?" cried Mrs. Levison, now fairly interested; "dear me, you are quite a hero!"

"Yes," he said sternly, "I saved her . . . thank God!"

"And why did she want to commit suicide?" inquired Mrs. Levison, with another application to the smelling-salts.

"Why?" he said bitterly, "because life was too hard for her—because she was alone, and desolate, and most bitterly wronged

. . . because," and his voice quivered, and Allison Saxton, looking up, saw that his eyes were dim, and his whole face convulsed as with some terrible agony—"because man and God alike seemed to have deserted her, and she was mad with suffering and grief!"

"Did she tell you her story?" asked Mrs. Levison in a softened and half-fearful voice—recognizing dimly the shadow of a tragedy such as her own life had never known.

"Yes," he said. "Will you hear it?"

She did not answer; but he scarcely noticed that.

Briefly, yet with the force and fervour of intense feeling, he told them the story of a girl's ruined life. He painted its early promise, its struggles, its gifts; he showed them its inner warfare in an uncongenial atmosphere—the rich and passionate nature craving love, and finding naught but coldness and indifference. Then, the hour of temptation; the sudden abandonment of duty; the utter and perfect submission to another rule—the rule of that love her soul had so long craved; the love that instead of her guardian had been her destroyer.

And as he spoke a strange white horror crept over Mrs. Levison's face, and Allison Saxton's heart began to beat with terror and apprehension. Before that story was ended she had sprung to her feet, and grasped his arm. Trembling and sick with dread she cried out: "Her name—her name?"

Then the woman on the couch flung out her hands as if to ward off some terrible nameless thing, that in the gathering gloom crept nearer, and yet more near. . . . "No, no," she shrieked. "Say it is not . . . Oh! my God—say it is not—Sheba."

He raised his white face and looked sternly back at the terrified woman. "It is Sheba," he said. "It was your daughter I saved from a suicide's grave. . . . It is her history you have heard . . ."

For a moment dead silence reigned throughout the room. It was broken at last by a frightened whisper, "Where—is she?"

Noel Hill hesitated. He looked at Allison Saxton's noble face—then at that white changed one beyond. At last he said very low: "I brought her—here. After all, you are her mother; she could go to no one else."

Swift as thought Allison Saxton crossed the room and seized the trembling hands. "He is right," she said; "you are her mother. Oh! don't be hard; don't be unforgiving. Think of what she has suffered. Think that God, perchance, sends this as a task for you to fulfil. Let me bring her to you . . . say you will forgive."

Mrs. Levison hesitated.

The shock of hearing this terrible story—the story of her own child's ruin—had stirred the very depths of even her shallow nature. She had always prophesied evil of Sheba, but she had not expected such an awful fulfilment of her prophecies. She shuddered as she

thrust aside Aunt Allison's clinging hands, and cowered back on her pillows.

"No!" she cried weakly, "I can't see her! I can't bear it . . . I am not strong enough for the shock. Oh! the disgrace—the horror of such a story . . . and every one will know it. I can never hold my head up again."

"Mrs. Levison," said Noel Hill sternly, "this is sheer nonsense. A plain duty lies before you—you must fulfil or neglect it, as you choose; but you cannot evade its knowledge. Had you seen your daughter as I have seen her—heard her story as I have heard it, you would not have the heart to hesitate one single moment. She is below—waiting. May I bring her to you?"

Still Mrs. Levison hesitated and wavered. It was asking too much of her, she felt. At last she dropped her handkerchief: "I have always done my duty—all my life," she sobbed. "No one shall say I neglected it even under such—a—terrible trial. Yes,—bring that unfortunate, misguided girl to her heartbroken mother!"

Noel Hill went rapidly over to the door. There he paused and looked back. . . . "Promise me," he said, "you will not be hard on her. She is ill and sadly changed. She cannot bear harshness——"

"I hope," said Mrs. Levison, with a faint revival of the old spirit—"I do hope, Mr. Hill, that I know my duty as a mother and a Christian. I shall not 'break the bruised reed,' even though I feel I ought to administer rebuke, instead of pardon."

CHAPTER LI.

"THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN."

MRS. LEVISON might have gone as near to "breaking the bruised reed" as she dared, without the reed resenting it.

When she saw that white stony face, those great pathetic eyes, the wonderful beauty and the still more wonderful gentleness of this once headstrong and troublesome daughter, amazement held her speechless. She could scarcely believe it was Sheba who knelt with bowed head at her side pleading humbly for forgiveness—scarcely believe that this stately and beautiful creature was the child she had been wont to scold and tyrannize over, but a few brief years before.

She could not speak one word of reproach, though Noel Hill and Miss Saxton had withdrawn.

Perhaps for the first time in her selfish and obstinate life, Mrs. Levison felt a pure and unalloyed thrill of Christian pity—the pity that illumines those lovely and gracious words, "Neither do I condemn thee." Perhaps some intuition of the shortness and

pettiness of life had come to her—the uselessness of all the pride and pomp of worldly circumstance, and the vanity of self-righteousness; or some voice may have whispered at her heart: "Can we, who forgive not, expect to be forgiven?" Be this as it may, she softened and broke down utterly as she saw her daughter's face once more.

"Don't tell me anything!" she cried; "I have heard enough. I won't blame you, my poor child. I—I am still your mother."

This being an obvious fact, did not seem to call for any special gratitude; but Sheba's low sobs and broken murmurs were all of penitence and remorse.

"You always said I was too headstrong. Oh, mother, mother! how right you were!" . . .

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Levison, to whom her verified prophecies were as balm in Gilead. "You thought I was harsh, but it was only for your good I spoke—only for your own good."

"Can you ever forgive me?" murmured the weeping girl. "Oh, mother, I have suffered so terribly; and now I have no one—no one!"

"I know it, my poor child—do not tell me more. Let the past be buried, and let there be peace between us. I, too, have suffered, Sheba . . . suffered in mind and body. You have only returned to nurse a poor broken wreck; for your mother is not long for this world, my dear—not for very long."

Then she wept bitterly because that truth sounded so pathetic, though she was far from believing it herself. Doctors had been deceived before now, and taken refuge in describing nature's triumphs as "miraculous." Perhaps they are so in the sense of combating erroneous treatment, and obstinate prejudices!

She listened, and condoled, and then, woman-like, broke down also; and for the first time in their lives mother and daughter mingled their tears together.

It was the best and surest way to reconciliation. It only added another weight to the burden of the girl's remorse, while justifying and soothing the mother's pin-pricks of condemnation.

Sheba was quite ready to believe that she had misjudged and wronged her mother—that she had been wilful, passionate, blind and wicked. The revulsion of feeling caused by a reception so different from her expectations, was a revulsion that naturally made all her impulses leap towards her mother, and accuse herself.

Never had Mrs. Levison felt so genial a glow of content and satisfaction as when she listened to Sheba's torrent of self-condemnation, and Sheba's humble and passionate gratitude. Never had she so appreciated the truth of that homely maxim—that "Virtue is its own reward"—as on this occasion.

There was only one drawback to her satisfaction. What would her husband say? But meanwhile she wept with and over Sheba,

and almost believed in her daughter's reiterated and passionate assurance that she herself was "an angel of goodness."

* * * * *

Wearied and spent, Sheba lay in her own old room that night. She looked so terribly ill that Aunt Allison would not leave her, but resolved to lie down on the couch by her side.

When she heard of what the girl had recently undergone, she marvelled that she was still alive.

From time to time they spoke in low disjointed murmurs, for sleep would not visit them; and the memory of old days came thronging back, and by that light it was not difficult to understand the errors of that girlish history.

"You know," Sheba said, "how I was always wondering and thinking about life, and what it would be, and how much deeper and fuller it *ought* to be than just the mere existence. And when I met Müller, it seemed as if the gates of a new world had been thrown open to me . . . everything was changed—all I used to believe in seemed poor, or trivial, or wrong—and he told me so much . . . more than I could bear, I sometimes thought; and then everyday life, just the eating and drinking, and working and sleeping—oh, it seemed so small, so trivial. Just like one step on a ladder that reached to all eternity . . . one day in all the vast ages that have been, and still will be. . . . And the only thing that seemed to make it endurable, or give one strength to bear, and courage to fight all its doubts and difficulties, seemed just—love. The love of one human being for another; and that love I had; the best gift of life—such love as I had dimly dreamt of, and never believed I could claim for myself."

"But, dear," said Aunt Allison gently, "you cannot surely believe that this man you worshipped was in any way better than any other of his sex—to whom love is merely the garment that clothes the selfishness of passion. He has wrecked your whole life—destroyed the purity of your womanhood. *That* is not love—not the divine unselfish part of love, that would not desecrate the object of its worship, but lives only for its highest happiness."

"You do not understand," said Sheba wearily. . . . "It is not to be expected. . . . No one outside the circle of our own knowledge *could* understand how it all came about. He was as reverential—as unselfish—as patient as man could be. But it was very hard . . . always that hateful unjust law between us . . . always the dread that after all we might be parted. We had vowed before Heaven that come what might we would be true to each other. . . . Oh, it looks like madness, no doubt; sometimes I think I was mad. There seemed no use in holding out. No human laws could consecrate our love more deeply than our own souls had done. And it is there—for always. We are parted now—but he will never forget—and I shall never forget.

And that one year held happiness so perfect and divine, that for its sake I was content to let all the future go."

Allison Saxton was silent. What could she say? It did indeed sound like madness; but was there something in that madness purer, deeper, holier than half the legalized barter upon which the Church sets its seal, and the world smiles its approval?

Almost she thought so as she looked at that young and noble face, and heard those simple, trustful words.

"I was wrong when I sought to destroy my life," said the girl presently. . . . "I know that now; but I think the fever was in my brain . . . I could not reason calmly. I knew that Paul had gone—that the law had given him back to the wicked woman who had wrecked his life. She would follow him to England. I—I could never bear to see him again. And then I heard the flow of the river at my feet and in a moment it seemed the thought came to me, 'Death is sweeter now than any life can be;' . . . and then I was sinking down . . . down in the cold dark water; . . . and as I sank, suddenly a light seemed to flash across my eyes and a great peace seemed to fill my heart, and all the fever and the pain died out, and I grew quite calm. I saw all my life before me just as if I looked into a mirror—everything I had done and thought . . . all the mistakes—the sadness—the weariness—the hours of struggle. . . . And then I seemed to fall into a deep sleep, and when I woke I heard Noel Hill's voice. . . . After that I had but one idea . . . to leave that place . . . never—never to go back. I made him bring me here—at once . . . I wanted Müller to think I was dead. . . . They found my cloak on the bank of the river next day. Noel Hill told me. We came at once to Sydney then. No one knew who I was. He managed it all. He got me some clothes and took me on board the steamer . . . he was very kind, poor Noel . . . I told him as much as I dared of my story, and he thinks my only hope of safety lies in concealing the fact that I still live, from Paul."

"But," said Allison, "if Paul should come back—if he should find you out?"

She shook her head. "He will not come back," she said. "They will tell him I am dead . . . and you forget . . . she—his wife as men call her—will have joined him in England. I do not think he will ever return here. I am sorry for Müller . . . poor old Müller; he loved me so well, and he was so proud of me and so determined that I should be famous and great. But doubtless he will join Paul. Sometimes"—and her voice trembled, and the great tears gathered slowly in her eyes—"sometimes I hope Paul will forget . . . and after a time be happy . . . It is best he should believe me dead . . . for indeed the Sheba Ormatroyd he knew *is* dead. Yes, dear Aunt Allison—to all intents and purposes dead as when she saw that

ghost of her old self in the dark Yarra waters . . . dead and buried deep in the grave of her own follies and mistakes. . . . She has nothing to do with the woman who rose from that cold river—baptized anew to the sorrows and responsibilities of life—but never more to taste its joys . . . never—never more!”

* * * * *

These pages only professed to give the story of Sheba Ormatroyd's girlhood. The task is finished.

If any one to whom that record of struggles, errors, doubt, and suffering has appealed, cares to follow out further the life that womanhood completes, they must seek its records in some possible sequel.

THE END.

LONDON LETTERS.

By MRS. HUMPHRY.

No. VI.

DEAR COUSINS,

Are we to smoke or not to smoke? That is the question of the hour. I conclude that you, like myself, have no leanings in that direction, so that we start our own private discussion of the matter with a comfortable unanimity of opinion. If you have read the letters appearing in the *Daily Telegraph*, you must have observed one circumstance that may perhaps tell in favour of the women who smoke. That is, that the letters written by them in favour of the practice are very much more witty and better-tempered than those contributed by the women who disapprove of smoking. But oh! what rubbish some of the letters are! One appeared the other morning, over which I found Mary almost snorting with indignation. It was apparently written by a tobacconist and related how "young ladies"—to what social class, by the way, do "young ladies" now belong?—came to his shop to buy cigarettes. "Are they for yourself, miss?" the vendor asks. And the purchaser replies in the affirmative, "with a conscious blush or a modest simper." What a picture of the young woman who smokes? Can't you see the "modest simper?" I am sure it must be a disgusting performance. And then the appreciative young man behind the counter, eyeing the "modest blush." Is it surprising that Mary gasped with incoherent scorn over the letter?

I am going to confide to you my own secret and private opinion about women who smoke. There are two kinds of them, I fancy. One contingent smokes because it has discovered the same soothing solace in the weed that men have enjoyed for so long. They work hard, many of these women, and find a cigarette an excellent pick-me-up. By all means, let them smoke.

The other sort of smoking woman does it out of pure fastness. She thinks men admire it. Many of them do, but not in their home and by "their ain ingle nuik." They delight in seeing a smart opera-bouffe actress daintily handle a cigarette. They watch with interest the languid graces of some golden-haired Anonyma as she trifles with an "Egyptian" over her *chasse-café*. But what a different expression their faces would wear if their wives, sisters, mothers, aunts or mothers-in-law were to "light up." I have seen a number of men in the stalls of a theatre applaud with almost frantic zest the singing of a pretty actress in the song,

"Je suis un peu grise, mais chut!"

Think of their faces if one of the angels of their household were to come into their presence with, "I'm a little bit tipsy, but hush!" There would be very little applause on that occasion, I fancy. The women whom men like to see smoking are the women whom they admire when they are not at home. There you have my ideas on the subject, and I know just a little of the world.

At the same time, I can quite understand a married couple enjoying a comfortable smoke together and finding in its dear delights another bond of union. But these are very exceptional cases. Men are very Conservative about women, but extremely Liberal about themselves, and the day is far distant when a man will hear with anything like equanimity the question: "Your wife smokes, I believe?" unless, indeed, he is a Bohemian pure and simple.

I know two women who smoke. One is tall, slight and dark-haired; she manipulates her cigarette with careless grace, leaning back languidly and showing a thin hand with long white fingers to some advantage. She never appears to be enjoying herself, but I suppose she likes to smoke or else she would not do it. The other is a piquante little blonde, all impulse and animation. There is no languor about her, but a constant effervescence of movement. I never saw even a man enjoy his smoke as she does. The only deliberate movements of the performance are those in which she slowly emits the smoke with half-closed eyes and an expression of luxurious enjoyment. I never see her smoke without understanding that it has its fascinations for those who have once tried it.

How you would enjoy the West End shops on these bright October afternoons!

The autumn costumes are marvellously simple of make, the skirts straight all round and the bodices with fronts opening over folds of cloth of a contrasting colour with that of the dress. Fire-side millinery is by no means so difficult as it has been of late, for it is easier to fit a little coat with loose fronts than a bodice, and the folds are among the simplest things in the world to arrange. The new accordion-pleated costumes are wonderful value for two guineas. For this sum one gets an indelibly pleated skirt, ready to mount upon a foundation skirt (which can be bought ready-made), and four yards of the *foulé*, of which the accordion costume is composed. These four yards are just sufficient to make a quite sweet little coat, which may be lined with silk of the same tint as the cross-over folds in front. The costumes are to be had in navy blue, dark grey, red, green, *réséda* and brown. I am delighted with them, because they cling in so nicely to the figure, and make it look as straight up and down as fashion requires.

Mary had the courage to pour boiling water on some of her

pleating to test it. We others watched the result in a kind of vicarious agony, but she—good girl!—was full of faith and confidence, which were justified by the result.

As I told you in a previous letter, we are studying thrift in all its branches, so as to have as much money as possible to expend upon our little country cottage and garden. We are always talking “plans” now. Is there a more enthralling occupation? I have noticed that even little children love “making plans,” and delight in hearing their elders plan out arrangements in which their small selves are included. When a little imagination is imported into the occupation, it develops into that delightful sort of architecture known as “building castles in the air.”

Three private subscription dances are to be given in November and December at the Queen’s Gate Hall, under the auspices of Mr. Harrison-Watson, in aid of the fund for providing dinners for destitute children belonging to the parish of St. Augustine, in the East End. This is a good cause, is it not? The dances are to be a sort of hybrid Cinderella, beginning at nine and ending at one o’clock. Get all your London friends to take tickets. They will hear all about the dances from Mr. Harrison-Watson, 70, Elm Park Gardens, S.W. It is strange that money is so hard to get for hungry little children when such enormous sums are daily spent upon pleasures and luxuries. Contrast Mr. Watson’s half-penny dinners at the East End with the prices paid for opera seats during Patti’s South American tour. The great singer was guaranteed a thousand pounds for each of her twenty-four performances at Buenos Ayres and eight at Monte Video. In addition to this, she was to have half the profits. So large was the attendance, and so highly paid were the seats, that her share amounted in all to £1,600 a night. So you see, dear cousins, that people can pay for their own pleasures.

But then, you may argue, this took place in South America, which could hardly be expected to subscribe to East End dinners. But I am quite ready for you with a reply. The Marquis of Bute, not very long ago, gave a dinner party which cost over £2,000. A wealthy man in the north of England spent £50,000 in building and decorating a billiard room for his own house. Two rose-coloured vases were bought at auction for a sum of £10,000. A chimney vase fetched £3,000, and a dessert service £2,000. The flowers for a London ball cost £1,000, and £150 was recently given for an orchid with three leaves. One would think, in the face of all this, that the half-penny dinners would be liberally subscribed to, but it is not so. The greatest difficulty is experienced in getting the money together for them. So tell all your friends about the dances.

C. E. H.

LONDON SOCIETY.

DECEMBER, 1889.

A NEW OTHELLO.

A NOVEL.

By IZA DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE, HONOUR AND OBEY," "NOT EASILY JEALOUS," "ONLY A LOVE STORY,"
"LOVE IN IDLENESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST.

"I tell you that Love is the bitterest sweet
That ever laid hold on the heart of a man,
A chain to the soul, and to cheer as a ban,
And a bane to the brain, and a snare to the feet!"

IT was some days before Ray found a chance of seeing Asenath alone, and he eagerly seized his opportunity when one afternoon he caught a glimpse of her in the room known as the Aquarium. This was not generally a very popular resort, as it both looked and felt somewhat chilly in the winter weather, with its big glass tanks lining the walls; but the select circle at Hygeia Hall had been treated to a mild entertainment the previous evening in the form of a lecture on "Dwellers in the Deep," and Asenath had taken it into her head to go and inspect the tanks in search of certain specimens of sea-anemones. At sight of her well-known figure, Ray was instantly seized with a hankering after ichthyological observations, and hastened to join her in the Aquarium. They exchanged a few interesting remarks about molluscs and sand crabs, and then Asenath moved towards the door.

"You are not going?" he said.

"Yes; I have finished my piscatorial studies for to-day."

"Why do you run away from me as though I were a wild beast?" he asked reproachfully.

"I was not running away."

"You avoid me," he rejoined; "you have avoided me ever since I came here. Why do you treat me so? What have I done now? Have I not obeyed your wishes?"

"Yes; I thank you," she replied, with a touch of sweet earnestness just faintly thrilling through her habitual coldness of manner to him.

"You said we should be friends," he continued; "why treat me as an enemy? You promised to trust me; why treat me as if you distrusted me?"

"We may be friends," she said, with perfect composure; "but I think we had better be friends at a distance."

"Yes, perhaps you are right," he replied moodily; "a world between us would not be wide enough for *me*!"

"Then why are you here?" she retorted. "I cannot devise a reason for leaving this place until my husband leaves; but *you*—are you bound to remain here? *You* have it in your power to put at least a few miles of 'the width of the world between us'—I cannot."

"You wish me to go?" he said, looking at her earnestly.

"Yes."

"*Why?*" he asked briefly.

"Because—because your presence naturally brings unpleasant and painful associations with it."

"Well, yes, I suppose it does," he admitted. "But why can't you forget them?" he added entreatingly; "why recall anything that it hurts you to remember?"

"It is not so easy for me to forget; I always hated anything secret and underhand!"

She had left a blot open—an opportunity for him to reply by the retort that the secrecy was her own desire. She perceived her unguarded move as soon as the words had left her lips; but *he* did not seem to perceive it, as he rejoined impetuously, "And you can't forgive me for having by my fault involved you in a secret? You are still angry with me? My presence is annoying—hateful to you?"

"It ought to be!" she said, looking steadily at him, with a curious light leaping like a flame in the calm depths of her eyes.

"And—it is?" he urged.

"And it *is*," she answered slowly, uttering the falsehood defiantly and unabashed.

"Well, I will remove it from you," he said passionately. "And this is all that the friendship—the forgiveness—you promised me is worth! I was fool enough to believe you meant what you said—that we might be friends, that you *would* forgive and forget! And all it meant was that when next we met you would sweep me out of your path as if I polluted the air you breathe! I will go! They will think it odd, when I said I was settled here for a fortnight longer—but I don't care!"

"You had better not go if your going would attract attention," she said, quietly and sensibly.

"Why should I stay to put my heart under your feet, for you to trample on?" he retorted. "You *like* to trample on it; you are as cruel as you cold, beautiful, statuesque women always are! I will not stay to make sport for you."

"Are you not rather hard to please?" she rejoined, growing still cooler as he waxed fiery. "You are not satisfied when I express a wish for you to go; you are not pleased when I am willing for you to stay: nothing satisfies you."

"No! nothing *will*, except what I dare not hope for—that you should feel for me only one-tenth part of what I feel for you!"

"It is difficult to measure the tenth part of an unknown quantity," she said, with a slight smile.

"It is not unknown to you," he replied boldly, recklessly. "You *do* know that I was, and *am*, as madly in love with you as mortal man can be. Nothing else could have palliated, excused—I don't say that even that can justify—my conduct towards you."

"I am glad you admit that it has been utterly unjustifiable," she said steadily. Then, with a slow and singularly sweet softening in her look and tone, she added, "But I think you forget—that I had forgiven it!"

"I did not forget it. I cherished it as my dearest, most treasured and sacred thought. I never for a moment forgot it until I thought that *you* seemed to have forgotten your own pardon."

"Do not *make* me forget it," she rejoined, looking at him with steadfast but not ungentle eyes. "I am not a very forgiving woman; and it is hard for me to remember it when you force me to think of—what it distresses me to recall."

"I will not!" he protested. "I never meant to; I did not mean to do so now. Only let us be friends, and I will never, never breathe one word that could possibly annoy you. Now, am I to go? Command and I will obey. Am I to go?"

"Yes, as soon as you can return to London without attracting attention by your change of plans, but not till then. It is not worth while to arouse any comment for the sake of just a few days."

"No, not the least worth while," he agreed eagerly. "I may stay a few days; and when you desire me to return to London I will obey your wish. Now, don't go; please wait a little. I want to look at the fishes; I wish you'd show me a—a—a sea-urchin!"

"I showed you two five minutes ago," she said smiling, and left him to pursue his ichthyological studies in solitude.

She went to her room, where she was glad to find herself alone. She walked up and down restlessly, like a creature in a cage. She

felt, indeed, as if the bars of some invisible cage were being closed upon her, shutting her in with that episode of the past from which she tried in vain to escape. She had come to Meriton not knowing who was there, not dreaming that there she would be thrown again into daily association with Ray Percival. And now, whichever way she looked, she found the thought of him facing her; she could not escape it, it shut and closed her in. The future? It seemed that he stood across the path and blocked all vistas of the future. The past? The past was that voyage on the "Sicilian." The present? The present was a surging sea of trouble, anger, apprehension, anxiety—and *he* the cause of all! And the worst of it was that she could not in her heart feel as angry with him as she desired to be.

He had struck a chord in her nature which only once, and then far more slightly, had been touched before. That once was in the days of Gervas Fitzallan's wooing, when her heart responded rather to the love than to the lover, before the days of disenchantment came. Then that chord had stilled, and nothing had stirred it again until Ray, unconsciously to himself, had found it out; and under his daring touch it vibrated with a thrill that seemed as if it would never cease. He did not himself at all realize the influence which he had attained over her by the mere force of his love. He did not know how the mere fact of being loved worked upon that susceptibility which lay so deep in her that none suspected its existence; and even she herself half wilfully, half blindly misinterpreted the feeling she could not ignore.

Ray had dared, audaciously dared, to tell her that he was madly in love with her—with *her*, Gervas Fitzallan's wife! That declaration struck her like a blow; and the chord of passion in her heart thrilled and throbbed under it, until she almost persuaded herself that, in her resentment of the insult, she hated, yes, *hated*, Ray! And yet she had forgiven him! and the deepest feeling in her nature now was her fervent faith in his truth and loyalty to *her*.

* * * * *

Two or three days after this interview in the Aquarium, it chanced that Asenath was sitting with Mrs. Percival and Kate in their family parlour, when Ray came in. Mrs. Percival had the newspaper in her hand, and they were talking over a pathetic case of shipwreck which she had just been reading—a case which, being honoured by a leading article, was thus removed from the long list of briefly recorded stories of disaster, which many eyes pass over unheeding, but which move the sympathies of all who, reading the terse report, realize the tragedy conveyed in a few bald words.

It was the wreck of a sailing-vessel, in which the captain and his wife, each refusing to leave the other and take the last place in the already over-crowded little boat, had both been drowned,

the survivors describing the last glimpse of the doomed pair standing on the sinking deck clasped in each other's arms.

Kate was exclaiming at the "dreadful sadness" of the story.

"They might have had a worse fate than dying together; it would have been sadder for one to be left," observed Asenath.

"Yes; I don't know after all that it *was* so sad," said Mrs. Percival softly, "to go down together and wake together in the next world!"

Ray was standing partly behind Asenath; he could not see her face, only the back of her coiled braids of hair, and she could not see him at all; yet both of them felt a strange consciousness of some subtle sympathy thrilling between them.

Just then Eileen came to the door and appealed to Momie to come and give her advice and assistance in a matter of millinery—the re-trimming of a hat; and Kate volunteered the contribution of a blue and silver aigrette, and went to her room to hunt for it in the recesses of her trunk.

Ray moved a little forward, a little nearer to Asenath, so that he could see her face. He took up the newspaper half absently, and glanced down at the article which his mother had just been reading.

"I don't pity those two so very much," he observed abruptly "Do you think that when two people die together they wake up in the next world together? *If*——" He barely uttered this la-brief syllable, yet had he expressed his thought in full—"if had died together!"—the memory of that moment of their mutual peril could not have come back to her more vividly. She was by his side again on board the reeling vessel, as it shuddered and seemed to sink beneath the heavy seas that overwhelmed it again she saw the pale flash of the huge wave leaping to them—felt the chill and darkness swallow them up; and she clung to him, not for safety, but for companionship, what danger!

She gave no sign of the thrill with which these memories came back to her, but replied quietly to his question:

"I think *not*. As each soul lives here to itself, and passes out of life as it entered it, solitary, so it wakes alone, in its own isolated heaven."

"How could it be heaven alone?" Ray demurred.

"The heaven of each individual soul comprises all the needs and desires of that soul—satisfies all its cravings. It is the realization of all our earthly longings—the consummation and perfection of all earthly joy. If the soul *needs* for its happiness in heaven those whom it loved on earth, for that soul they will be there."

"Then you believe," he said, "that when I die, I shall have with me *then* the one I love best, whether she cares for me here or not?"

"That is the esoteric theory of the state we call heaven," she replied. "You may not be with *her*, but if you need her, *she* will be with *you*!"

"It seems a cold idea, and unreal—a fantastic sort of dream," he observed.

"It *is* cold—life is cold. And unreal? What is reality but consciousness? If you are conscious of a thing, it is there—it exists for you; if you have no consciousness of it, then for you it does *not* exist."

"And you think that there is no reality in the next world?"

"Is there reality in this? The things we touch and see are only tangible and visible to us because they produce a certain effect on us through our senses."

"Yes; I know the line you go upon," he rejoined; "matter is an expression of force—life a result of atoms set in motion—death the cessation of that motion—love a disturbance of certain molecules; I know how you analyze it all."

"Not *all*. We cannot analyze the force behind the motion. We know how the machine works; we watch the wheels revolve, and stop; we do not know what sets the machinery in motion of either life or the thing that we call love."

"In which you do not believe?"

"I believe there are two souls in a million capable of it. For these two, when they meet, there *may* be reunion in a future state where there may be a force of affinity strong enough to draw them together in life after life, world after world! But for the rest of the million, the miserable flitting passion they dare to dignify by the name of love is briefer even than our brief little span of earthly life—they leave it behind in the grave with the flesh to which it thrilled. It is only a plaything to while away an empty day, that, in treatment usually meted out to it is good enough

And yet *she*—
nature *not* love!" he said, looking at her intently.

"*And not!*" she replied emphatically, with a flash that was fiercer in her clear cold eyes. "I have no heart! I am not like a clinging vine that needs a prop—I am quite content to stand alone. I am more like the jolly miller of the Dee," she added more lightly, but still with a faintly perceptible touch of bitterness:

" 'I care for nobody, no not I!
And nobody cares for me!'"

But Ray did not place implicit faith in these professions. He felt vaguely that Asenath "did protest too much;" he realized by unerring instinct that the snow of her nature did not lie very deep; it could be melted; and there were sweet blossoms—even glowing passion flowers folded underneath it.

He knew how tenderly her cool soft fingers could rest on a

fevered brow, how gentle and sympathetic her voice could be ; and surely there was no woman's voice quite like hers, with its restful music and "fluctuant languor :"

" Lovely and peaceful as a moonlit deep—
A voice to dream of in the calm of night !
A voice, the song of fields that no men reap.
* * * * *
A pause of shadow in a day of heat.
* * * * *
A voice to make Death tender and Life sweet !"

No ! he did not believe that Asenath was as content as she professed herself to "stand alone."

Kate's return changed the tone of conversation, somewhat to Asenath's relief. She dreaded this constant drifting into personalities with Ray ; she knew it was indiscreet—nay, dangerous ; and yet when they two were *tête-à-tête* she never could succeed in keeping the conversation in a judiciously impersonal tone.

That evening in the parlour the subject of the pathetic story of the shipwreck again came up, and Geoffrey, whose literary studies did not generally extend far beyond the daily paper, but who seldom failed to pay his duty to that in the form of a conscientious, if cursory, skimming down every column, brought in another incident which was recorded in the day's news. This was the escape of a convict, who had dropped over a high parapet into a river and swum two miles with the current before he was captured.

"Reminds one of that Charcott business," he observed.

"Only he wasn't taken, was he ?" asked Eileen.

"No, he was drowned, I think ; I forget how it was exactly. A ill-looking young thief he was," Geoffrey remarked, in a tone of indolent casual reminiscence.

"Was he ?" said Mrs. Percival, with mild inquiry of a degree removed from indifference. "I don't remember. I'd a sort of vague impression he was rather good-looking."

"Oh, his features were well enough, I suppose, as far as but recall them. It was his expression. I remember his ugly scowl as he stood in the dock ; when Brownlow was giving his evidence, he looked at him like a fiend ; you'd have said he had the evil eye, only Brownlow didn't wither away under it."

"Who was this Charcott ?" asked Dr. Fitzallan carelessly, with a slight and passing glance up from the *Saturday Review*, over which his head was bent.

His wife was the nearest of the group to him, and as Lady May, just as he spoke, was asking Geoffrey something about the superstition of the Evil Eye, it happened to be Asenath who answered her husband's question.

"He murdered an old clerk in Mr. Carresford's employment."

"How do *you* know?" Fitzallan retorted, with a certain sharpness and suddenness.

"I heard them talking about it once."

"You've a wonderful memory for names," he observed, somewhat stiffly; "if a name's only mentioned once you remember it."

"Yes, I have a good memory for names."

"And for dates, too," he said, more genially, though not looking in her face as he spoke; "you're always a great help to me about dates. It's very convenient to have a kind of live calendar or annual register to refer to."

Dr. Fitzallan seldom made any observation so pleasant and complimentary as this to his wife; it was long indeed since he had told her she was a help in any way to him. She gave him a gentle, grateful, responsive smile—the gentler because a little twinge of self-reproach tingled suddenly in her heart. If her unvarying loyal helpfulness to him, her daily care of his comforts, were less of duty and more of love, he would be less bitter and cold with her, and how much happier they both would be!

The stream of conversation, turned into other channels, did not return to the deceased convict, Charcott; and on one alone of all the party that casual allusion had made a deep impression. Into Fitzallan's mind it sunk like a stone into dark deep waters, and the black sluggish ripples closed over it unrevealing, and held it up-bidden down in their midnight depths.

"Poor George Charcott!" he said to himself, with a bitter, scornful smile; "dead and drowned! his evil expression gone with him to the next world! Peace to his bleaching bones, wherever they lie—under the water or in the earth!"

tion.

thrilled

that, in Fitzallan was rather popular in the Hygeia Hall, from the And yet so the lowest members of the establishment. Although nature: often something cold and stern and brusque about his; his general disposition was not unkindly; his attention as readily enlisted in behalf of the ails of the poor as those of the rich. The chambermaid who was troubled with a raging tooth, and the waiter who suffered from sciatica, benefited by his disinterested and philanthropic ministrations; so did the stable-boy's little brother, who was afflicted with St. Vitus's dance. Dr. Fitzallan's success in alleviating, if not in curing, this last case, brought an application to him from the landlady of the "Red Dragon" to attend her little girl, who had the same complaint in a bad form. His first visit to this little patient happened to be on a cold showery day, and as it was pouring with rain when he was about to take his leave, the landlady, grateful for his careful attention to her child, and rather proud of the attendance of one whom she regarded as a "fine London doctor," insisted on his stepping into

her parlour, taking a glass of wine, and waiting until the shower was over.

Two other gentlemen were in the same room, well-dressed customers whom mine hostess evidently thought too good for the bar-parlour, with its sanded floor and pewter tankards, and whom she had therefore treated to the privilege of the best parlour, with its horsehair sofa and faded Brussels carpet of once gorgeous pattern and colouring. These gentlemen were partaking of sherry and sandwiches—appetite and exercise evidently providing the best of sauces for this light luncheon—and the three guests naturally drifted into conversation whilst the rain kept them weather-bound. They were probably all the more sociably disposed for not being true and thorough, born-and-bred Anglo-Saxons. One had a touch of the brogue, another an accent which slightly savoured of the Trans-Atlantic, while Dr. Fitzallan, generally supposed to be Anglo-American, was about as little of a typical Englishman as a man of English parentage can be. The three were talking in quite a friendly and sociable way by the time that the cessation of the rain broke up their desultory chat. Dr. Fitzallan, who was given to the moral picking up of pins, and never passed by the merest trifle which might prove to be of use some day, who especially never neglected the chance of an acquaintance or an introduction—being in this habit especially more American than English—expressed his pleasure at having met these gentlemen and handed them his card, an attention which they readily returned.

“Dr. Fitzallan,” said one, reading the card in his hand. “Why now, I wonder if it was a relative of this gentleman’s we e the pleasure of meeting on the voyage out to Quebec on the ‘*Sicilian*’?” He

“My wife crossed to Quebec on the ‘*Sicilian*,’” said the doctor.

“Why—why! what a little nutshell of a world it is!” what rejoined. “I remember Mrs. Fitzallan well.” sincere,

“Indeed, no one was likely to forget her who had the pleasure of seeing her and hearing her sing,” added the second gentleman—he of Hibernian descent—in a complimentary tone.

Dr. Fitzallan smiled in courteous acknowledgment of the compliment; he liked the value of his property to be duly appreciated.

“Yes, you have a very charming wife, sir,” observed the American—or, more correctly speaking, the Canadian, as he turned out to be, “and a lady not to be admired for her personal charms alone. She was quite the heroine of the ship, when that poor mad fellow attacked her and Mr. Percival rescued her; a handsome young fellow *he* was, too, by the way, and a plucky one.”

Dr. Fitzallan’s imperturbable composure and self-control stood him in good stead. Not a movement of his features betrayed

the sudden dart of suspicious wonder that struck him at that name.

"Yes," he assented, coolly and easily. "Let me see—I forget; which of the Percivals was it? Tom?—a short, rather stout fellow, with black hair and beard?"

"Oh, no; tall and fair; no beard, only a little moustache, and quite light colouring," replied one of the strangers.

"Reddish-brown hair, and carried himself very erect," put in the other, amiably anxious to complete the description.

"Ah, yes—yes, a fine young fellow he is, and plucky, as you say," replied Dr. Fitzallan quietly. He was standing with his back to the window; and his tone was perfectly composed and self-possessed as he added, "That was an unpleasant adventure; my wife tried to make light of it, not to cause me anxiety, but it must have been alarming."

"That it was! Any other woman on board would have gone off into hysterics and made scenes. Every one admired Mrs. Fitzallan's courageous calmness."

"And young Percival, too; I scarcely realized how much I had to thank him for! He looked after her well, I am sure?"

"That indeed he did!"

"I fancy I saw one of you gentlemen on board, did I not?"

Fitzallan continued affably, "when I saw my wife off at Liverpool?"

"Not me," replied the Celt. "I went on board at Moville with Percival and a couple of others; my friend here came on from Liverpool."

"Where I fancy I must have seen him. I was very sorry I did not go on to Moville with my wife. I like to put her in the hands of some friends when the stern demands of business prevent my accompanying her."

"Mr. Percival took very good care of her, and so did she when he was ill. I remember I used to think how that charge was a perfect ideal of a ministering angel."

"Canadian cast a glance from one to the other of his two companions as if in a momentary doubt whether his comrade's flattering allusions to this gentleman's wife might not be a little too freely and confidentially made. There was nothing in Dr. Fitzallan's manner, however, to warn the innocent appreciator of Asenath's charms and qualities that he had been guilty of the slightest indiscretion, or that he had unawares revealed a secret dangerous to domestic peace.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STORM-CLOUDS GATHER.

" Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell !
 Yield up, O Love, thy crown and hearted throne
 To tyrannous Hate !—Swell, bosom, with thy freight,
 For 'tis of aspic's tongues !

* * * * *

Yet I'll not shed her blood,
 Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow ! "

DR. FITZALLAN had passed through many an ordeal which necessitated self-command ; but never yet had he achieved so triumphant a mastery over himself as the supreme effort by which he had preserved an easy and equable manner while he listened to the accidental disclosure of these chance acquaintances met by the way, and drew them on skilfully to fuller and conclusive details.

His position, with his back to the light, had been a help to him ; his face being in the shadow, any slight variation of colour had not been perceptible so long as he held his features in good control. But the effort had taxed his powers to their fullest, and even now, as he walked away from the " Red Dragon " alone and unobserved, he dared not relax the strain of enforced composure.

If once he let the flood of fury surging up in his heart break loose and have its way, he knew not whither it might carry him ; he only knew that in that case he would cease to be responsible for his acts. He must not let his passion break its chain. He *must* be master of himself—hold even his thoughts in curb. He compelled himself to reduce those stormy, struggling thoughts to order—to deliberately review and reflect upon what he had heard—the chance disclosure, trustworthy beyond a doubt, for what interest could these casual acquaintances, so evidently sincere, have in inventing a story to deceive a stranger ?

First, as to identity. The description he had drawn from them by his allusion to a fictitious Percival, short and stout and dark, put that beyond question. Besides, now, various trifles—faint shades of expression and reserve in Ray's manner to Asenath, and in hers to him, flickerings of colour, momentary glances, atoms of indication, almost invisible motes floating in the air, meaningless till this revelation gave them significance—now, in this new light, came together and took shape.

Then he proceeded to set the facts, as he knew them, in order and sequence. That Tuesday evening they had dined at the Percivals'—Asenath's last in London before her voyage—Ray Percival had then been about to start for Switzerland on the morrow or next day, his proposed tour openly talked of as a

fixed and settled thing. He and Asenath had been for some time alone in the garden. Fitzallan remembered now how many opportunities of *tête-à-tête* those two had had. That night Asenath had returned home in a silent mood and had explained her silence on the ground of fatigue and headache. The next morning they had gone to Liverpool; on the Thursday he had seen her off on the "Sicilian," and on the Friday, at Moville, Percival—who should by that time have been in Switzerland—had joined her. Not at Liverpool, where he knew her husband was to see her on board, but at Moville, where it was *safe*. Fitzallan knew by many chance words dropped by Mrs. Percival and the girls that they had supposed Ray to be on the Continent all the time of his absence—the time during which he crossed the ocean with Asenath, and—for aught Fitzallan knew, as the idea suggested itself to him now—might have lingered near her in Quebec. She had not talked much about her voyage out, only mentioning in a casual way that she had been frightened by an insane fellow-passenger; but as it was not as a rule Asenath's habit to be very loquacious about her own experiences, he had not thought her reticence strange until now. And now he saw all the links fall into order in the chain of evidence that proved him wronged and outraged.

They had kept their secret well certainly, the secret only now by such mere chance revealed. Never had anything in Asenath's manner led him to suspect that her eyes had rested on Ray Percival's face from the Tuesday night when they parted in London till the day they met at Hygeia Hall. He had long known her reserved, reticent and self-contained; he knew her now designing, treacherous, dishonourable and dishonoured—what other interpretation could he place upon the circumstances which had now come to his knowledge? He was always more in his element when tracing the crooked ways of human nature than the straight ones; his own tendencies disposed him always to think the worst while there was still room to hope the best, to grope in the darkness for the hidden things of evil, to suspect secret sin lying in the apparently pure soul, as potential disease may lurk in the seeming healthy body.

Now he saw himself betrayed—Asenath, with all her seeming purity, stained with guilt—and he compelled himself to steady self-control as he pondered what should he do. That was hard to decide; he could make up his mind more easily what he would *not* do! He would have no scenes of reproaches and recriminations, of tears and protestations, perhaps of pleading—if his proud Asenath would stoop to plead. He had no thought of giving her the chance of explanation—of self-defence—of doing her the bare justice of hearing her own story. Nor would he have publicity nor scandal. Under no circumstances would he drag his wrongs into the vulgar, commonplace mire of the Divorce Court, nor stand pilloried as a wronged and befooled husband before the world.

No ; nor should the matter become public talk in another and a more tragic way. No murderous blow should pay *his* debt to *them* !

His foot was on the ladder of success ; he would not hurl himself down because one woman more proved false.

If he and *they* could be transported, but for one little hour, to some wild and lonely spot beyond the reach of the law, where a man's right hand was free and unfettered to avenge his own wrong—where the impulse of wild justice was not paralyzed by the cold shadow of the prison and the scaffold—then, ah, then and there he would know right well what to do !

He would appeal to no law to help him ; he could deal his own justice then ! A slow smile, more sinister than any frown, parted his lips as he let his imagination run free, and it flew back to the wild solitudes he had known, the silent wilderness of the forest primæval, the deep and lonely fastnesses of mountain gorge and cañon, the desolation of the rolling prairie. If he could but have them *there* !

But no such dream could be realized. The law had a long arm ; there was no chance of luring those two to any spot beyond its reach. Moreover, he could not afford to let himself dwell upon the thought. He knew that he could command himself up to a certain limit, but once that limit was passed, he might as well tell fire and rising sea to stop as strive to control himself !

He passed the Hygeia Hotel and walked on. Asenath might expect him—wait for him, but he literally dared not trust himself to face her yet !

Gervas Fitzallan was by habit kindly. He viewed suffering with the eye of the physician, calm but kind, anxious to relieve it if he could, but not overmuch moved by witnessing it if it were beyond his power to alleviate. He regarded it as his mission to help and heal, and would have gone out of his way to bind up a beggar's wound or a dog's injured paw—if neither beggar nor dog had given him any offence. But offend or wrong Gervas Fitzallan and his heart turned to steel ! Then you might die at his feet, crying out for a helping hand to soothe or save, in vain ! If he had seen his enemy stretched on the rack he would have looked on with deliberate satisfaction, and offered to give the handle a turn if the executioner was tired. If a faithless wife had betrayed him, she might look for little mercy at his hands !

The principal drawing-room at Hygeia Hall was a long, handsome room, with two smaller ones opening off it, separated by arched doorways screened by high and heavy *portières*. These little parlours were cosier, if less magnificent, than the large central one, and were apt to be taken tacit possession of by family parties. This evening some of Mr. Carresford's party were in possession of one of them. Mr. Carresford himself was turning

over a volume of *Punch* with an indolent and slightly bored air, wondering whether May was coming back; she had gone up to her own room to write a letter. Near to Geoffrey Eileen was sitting, doing some dainty floral embroidery by the light of the same central lamp which illuminated the pages of his *Punch*, and at the end of the same table Dr. Fitzallan was bending over a big book.

In the recess of the bay window, Kitty was amusing Mr. Bartram; he was always willing to allow himself to be amused by a woman who was young and lovely; and Kitty never found the task of entertaining anything in the shape of a man, old or young, a wearisome one. So these two not only were, but looked as if they were, enjoying themselves, which would be too strong an expression to apply to the other pair who were seated beside a little table near the larger central one, Ray Percival and Mrs. Fitzallan, she bending her head over a piece of fancy work, he professing to read, but not paying much attention to the yellow-backed railway novel he had in his hand. Asenath wore her usual cold and placid expression, with that half-dreamy look, like the touch of a distant shadow of sadness, which seemed natural to her face in repose. Ray looked abstracted, as if his thoughts were wandering and troubled.

Dr. Fitzallan's arm rested on the table, his brow on his hand, which partly screened his eyes. From beneath the penthouse of his shading fingers he cast every now and then a keen searching glance at these two. There was certainly nothing in the manner of either—as they sat apparently separately absorbed, the one in her fancy work, the other in either his book or his thoughts—to which even the eye of jealousy could take exception. But presently Ray put down his book and looked at her; and as if she felt his eyes upon her, she glanced up and gave him a faint, cold smile, no warmer than a gleam of wintry moonlight; but it encouraged him to make some remark on the book he was reading. She replied, and they drifted into a desultory sort of chat, too slight and fragmentary to be called conversation; while he occasionally turned over a page, and her needle went lightly in and out of her strip of satin.

Dr. Fitzallan could hear all they were saying; there was neither importance nor significance in their light and indifferent passing remarks about the book and its brethren by the same author. But something in the mere contemplation of those two together stirred the very depths of his nature, lashed up the wild animal that crouched there. It was always there, locked up and chained; sometimes it slept, but its sleep was light and uncertain; he knew it well; he had spent years of his life in trying to tame it, and yet all he could do was to keep it under bolt and bar. It growled and leapt against the cage sometimes; it chafed and dashed against the bars now, watching those two. They were well matched in

appearance—better than Asenath and himself. Ray, tall and young and lithe, with his fair, handsome face, looked a fitter mate for her beauty than her middle-aged, grey-bearded husband. The sense of the contrast enraged him, as he felt that *she* must have felt it too. She was not proof against the earthly allurements of mere personal attraction—even she! the wife he had thought pure because she was passionless—true because she was cold. Yes, she *looked* all that he had thought her! That pale, clear-featured face, so pure and calm—those deep, gentle, serious eyes, whose limpid depths seemed the very home of truth! The soul that looked out through those clear eyes should be pure and white as moonlight upon snow! And *she* was faithless, false—that seeming fair soul smirched with vulgar guilt! Her brown hair was simply coiled high up on her head, without any flower or ornament. So arranged it showed at their loveliest the long graceful curves of her firm, fair throat. She had on a light dress, partly open at the neck, in the always pretty and becoming V shape, and round her neck hung by a thin gold chain one of her favourite locket—a horseshoe set with diamonds. The sparkle of those brilliants caught and held her husband's eye. Strange and savage ideas shot through his brain as the wild animal in him chafed and struggled in the fetters of the iron will. How would it be if he were to make one tiger-like spring, one deadly grip, at that white throat of hers, before Ray Percival's eyes! He knew perfectly well that he should not do it, but there was something tempting in the idea; he gave it to his chained lower self to gloat over.

He had no real intention of doing her any personal injury; secure in his resolution not to carry the thought into action, he could afford to let himself dally with the idea. He meant to punish her, he resolved that she should suffer; but as yet he had not determined how, only that his would be no commonplace revenge. His day of reckoning with Ray Percival, too, would come, and a heavy reckoning it would be!

They should pay—pay, both of them, to the uttermost; but the day of reckoning was not yet.

His hand had unconsciously dropped from his brow as he gazed at the two, with these thoughts in his mind—the evil spirit in him waxing stronger as he gave it such devilish ideas to prey upon, and left it room to rise up freer and freer, until it looked out of his eyes and transformed those generally cold, steel-blue eyes with the revelation of the Satanic and fatal forces at work in the soul. The deadly passion and purpose there betrayed itself for a moment in that sinister glare, like a blue flame under the lowering brows.

Ray's attention was fixed on Asenath, Asenath only cast a brief glance up from her embroidery at Ray. Neither of these two caught that look on her husband's face which, had they seen it, must have warned them of danger; but Fitzallan, suddenly

becoming conscious of the unusual betrayal of his expression, and glancing round quickly, met Geoffrey Carresford's eyes fixed full upon him with an almost startled gaze of surprise, curiosity, doubt.

Fitzallan returned the look coolly, the frown faded from his forehead; the sinister flash had died out of his eyes.

"You want the other volume of *Punch*?" he said, and reaching it from the other side of the table, politely handed it to Mr. Carresford. But Geoffrey did not avail himself of the courtesy; a more serious look than usual was on his frank, genial face, as he turned over the leaves of a volume of some illustrated magazine, while Fitzallan returned to his wonted aspect and to the perusal of his book.

Presently Asenath rose, rolling up her strip of embroidery, and came towards the centre table. Her husband, looking up to meet her, by a brief gesture motioned her to take the chair by his side, and she obeyed the mute indication of his wishes. Ray at first glanced after her undecidedly, then reopened his neglected novel, and remained at the side-table.

For a little while the merry murmur of voices in the bay window were the only sounds in the room, except the soft, low click of Eileen's busy needle and the rustle of pages turned over.

Then Geoffrey apparently found something that mildly interested him in his magazine volume; he read more attentively for a minute or two, and presently observed, laying down the book:

"I say, Eily; here's something in your line! Do *you* have pins stuck into you when you're off in your mesmeric sleep, or trances, or whatever they are?"

"Why, no!" replied Eileen, looking up at him with an amused and surprised smile, and glancing at Dr. Fitzallan as if appealing to him for further explanation.

"No," Fitzallan said blandly; "we do not turn Miss Eileen into a living pin-cushion. I see you are reading some account of those experiments, Mr. Carresford. They are common enough."

"It says," rejoined Geoffrey, looking back at his book and quoting, "two long scarf-pins were then thrust completely through the girl's arm without eliciting the slightest sign of sensibility."

"Yes, it is very common, as a sensibility test," observed Fitzallan.

"I should not like to see such tricks played on any one I was interested in," said Geoffrey.

"They are really not at all necessary, although popular and effective," the doctor rejoined. "There is another sensibility test equally efficacious—there is a certain nerve in the arm on which hardly the strongest nerved person can stand a pinch without crying out. It is just about here—" he passed his fingers

over his wife's arm. "A little difficult to find it through the sleeve," he observed pleasantly; "yes! here it is, I think."

Asenath suddenly flushed scarlet, winced, and shut her lips tight. Ray had put down his book and had almost involuntarily risen and moved towards them when Fitzallan took hold of her arm; he saw her face change and flush, and he caught his breath as he made one hasty step forward.

"We don't want you to experimentalize on Mrs. Fitzallan, Doctor," said Geoffrey quickly and disapprovingly, before Ray could utter a word; indeed, Ray could not trust himself to speak; his blood was boiling; he had turned white as death and unconsciously clenched his hand.

"I am not hurting her," replied Fitzallan smiling, with quite an easy, genial air. "I was merely finding that nerve. It did not hurt you, did it, Asenath?"

"No, no—not at all," she protested with an apprehensive stolen glance aside at Ray, whose white look of fiery anger she rather felt than saw. "I dare say it would hurt if it were pinched hard, but you did not hurt me at all, Gervas!" she added with a smile, though her lip still quivered with the pain of which she had successfully restrained any natural expression.

Geoffrey's frank face was clouded with a sterner look than it usually wore. Slow of perception as he was, he did not put implicit faith in Mrs. Fitzallan's assurance. Ray choked back his fury with an effort; even *he* retained just sense and self-control enough to see he would do more harm than good by interference under such circumstances. Eileen's soft, innocent eyes turned to Fitzallan's face, large with perplexed wonder. He was always so kind! Was it possible that Geoffrey and Ray thought he would hurt his wife's arm intentionally? There was certainly something odd and hard about that smile of his, but he, who was always so gentle with *her*—he, surely, could never be unkind to his wife? He met her questioning, wondering eyes; and the curious hard expression softened just a shade.

"Miss Eileen is not in the least afraid I should run scarf-pins through her arm, I hope?" he said pleasantly.

"No, indeed, I am not."

"The 'heavy weights test' is really a much more interesting one," Asenath broke in eagerly. "There was a girl in New York—a slender, weakly girl—who could lift a five-hundred pound weight and hold it with one arm extended, in the magnetic trance." She spoke quickly, fluently, anxious to turn the conversation and keep the ball rolling, for, although she did not look at Ray, she felt while he was standing near, as if she were beside a dynamite clock, ticking near to the fatal hour, and likely to go off at any moment. She did not need to look at him to know with what difficulty he had controlled himself. Her efforts, carried on with feminine smoothness and facility, and seconded by her husband,

were succesful in keeping the conversation out of dangerous lines until the party broke up, somewhat earlier than usual.

"Why did you hurt my arm so, Gervas?" Asenath asked her husband when they were alone; "it pains me still."

"You have good nerve, Asenath," he said coolly. "Nine women out of ten would have screamed out."

"I wish you would take my nerve for granted, without putting it to these unpleasant tests," she rejoined.

"I did not think it would hurt you much," he said; "I only gave it a very slight pinch. If I had wanted to hurt you I could have given a grip that would have *made* you shriek, with all your nerve."

"I have no doubt you could, but I hope you won't."

"I would not have touched that delicate arm of yours at all," he said with a sneer, "if I had thought you would have made such a fuss about a trifle."

Gervas Fitzallan certainly had the knack of saying disagreeable things. Asenath coloured at the injustice, and spoke not another word for some time. After a while, observing that he was looking at her in a strange, fixed, abstracted way, she said, reopening conversation in a conciliatory tone:

"What are you thinking of, Gervas?"

"Oh, a—a Shakesperian discussion they were having in the smoking-room this evening."

"Yes?" she said interrogatively, prepared to respond if he were sociably inclined.

Asenath, to do her justice, was generally ready to bury the hatchet; but it always happened, unluckily for these two, that no matter how comfortably and deeply it was buried, one or other of them was sure, sooner or later, to dig it up again.

"And what play were they discussing?" she asked.

"'Othello,'" he answered briefly.

"A fruitful subject for discussion. There is so much to be said about it," she observed.

"There's one thing on the face of it, to my mind," he rejoined, "Othello was a fool."

"He was certainly a brute and a savage," said Asenath, who felt more sorrow and sympathy for Desdemona than she generally wasted upon characters in fiction.

"On the contrary," said her husband, "I think he was too merciful."

"The very last fault I should have imagined any one would lay to Othello's charge," she remarked.

"Yes, he was too merciful," he repeated. "In his place I would not have *killed* Desdemona. I would have made her rue the day I let her live."

Something in his tone and in his look sent a chill through Asenath's veins.

"Othello *loved* her, savage though he was," she replied with a faint touch of bitterness.

"Yes; I perceive the inference. But what do women like *you* know about love?"

"Very little," she replied as briefly as possible, scenting danger in the subject and endeavouring to avoid it, regretting that she herself had introduced the word.

"Apparently I have not been very successful in educating your—*mind*—I was going to say *heart*!" he sneered—"in that line. Have you learnt in any other school? Has any other man been good enough to initiate you in that lesson, which I believe is generally considered a pleasant one to learn?"

She did not shrink nor waver, but lifted her head and looked him searchingly in the face with her clear eyes.

"Do you mean such a question as a serious suspicion of me, Gervas?"

If he had replied by any allusion to his suspicion or knowledge of her understanding with Ray Percival, she would have summoned up her courage and told him all the truth—yes, and been glad to tell it. But he only replied with a sardonic smile:

"No, of course not. Do you not know my way of joking by this time? How should I suspect the coldest, purest, most passionless of women?"

* * * * *

Meanwhile Geoffrey and Ray had walked off together to enjoy a sociable smoke before going to bed, and having the smoking-room to themselves, they waxed confidential in their communion.

"I say, Ray," observed Geoffrey, "do you know, I fancy that fellow Fitzallan's rather a brute?"

"I'm *sure* of it," said Ray, who was still nursing his wrath on Asenath's behalf.

"But *you* didn't see the way he looked at his wife this evening," Geoffrey rejoined. "It was when you were talking to her, and you weren't looking at him; *I* was, and if ever I saw an evil look on a man's face it was on his to-night. He looked at that woman as if he meant to murder her, and was thinking which way he'd do it."

"Good God, Geoff!" exclaimed Ray, turning first red, then white, "don't talk like that. I saw to-night that he could be cruel to her; but you don't—you don't think he would—do her any harm?"

"Well, his looks belie him if he wouldn't! But then," he added more prudently, "I daresay it may be only looks. It doesn't follow because a man has for once a wicked look that he'll carry it

out into a wicked act. I don't like the fellow, but I didn't mean to convey that I seriously supposed he'd commit murder ; and, look here, Ray, the less you bother your head about this interesting young woman's matrimonial grievances—if she has any—the better !”

“ I suppose you'd have me look on tamely and see her ill-used by a man I have seen already brutal to her, and whom you yourself just now implied you thought capable of murdering her,” Ray rejoined hotly.

“ I don't see how you can help it,” said Geoffrey, who was as cool as Ray was warm, deliberately knocking the ashes off his cigar.

“ No, that's the worst of it !” Ray broke out passionately. “ She won't *let me* help it. If she only would let me—if she did not hold me off with my hands tied ! If she would only give me the right to help her——”

“ Ray, have you lost your senses ?” Geoffrey interrupted, more sternly than he had ever spoken to Ray before.

“ I think I *am* half mad,” Ray muttered moodily.

It was the first time that he had ever breathed to any human being a word of his feelings for Asenath ; and he would not have betrayed himself now if it had not been for his excited mood, and the storm roused in him by the idea of her being subjected to any ill-treatment—nay, being perhaps in actual danger.

“ Do you know, Ray, where this sort of thing would lead you ?” continued Geoffrey. “ Can't you see that if followed up it could have but one end—some shameful scandal ? Would you break your mother's heart and bring disgrace upon us all ?”

“ You could '*all*' cut me adrift and let me go,” Ray answered bitterly. “ But you needn't fear ; she wouldn't let me be anything more to her than a distant acquaintance—hardly even a friend, powerless to give her any help or do her any good.”

“ She shows her sense,” interposed Geoffrey.

“ Did you not see to-night,” Ray went on vehemently, “ she would not let us know she was hurt ? She would have let that devil torture her, and kept a smiling face, rather than let us see how he treated her.”

“ I think she *is* a woman of sense and spirit,” admitted the elder man. “ I hope she is, for your sake, boy ; for I see she'll have to show sense for the two of you. *Your* head's fairly turned !”

But he did not speak unsympathetically. Ray's evident suffering touched him ; he did not like to see the young fellow, who always seemed “ the boy” of old days still to him, look so desperately troubled.

“ I—I am awfully sorry about this, old fellow,” he added more gently. “ I didn't dream it was this way with you, at least I didn't think it was so bad.”

"It couldn't well be worse," said Ray, with the ghost of a smile.

"You must fight it down, dear old boy," said Geoffrey, laying his hand kindly on his shoulder; "you *must*—for—for every one's sake. You can't be so blind as not to see that you *can* do her no good. You can bring her nothing but——"

"Don't say it," Ray interrupted him, wincing. "I know—I know all you could say to me; I've said it all to myself; don't go through it all again. I'm half out of my mind, and can't stand it. I didn't mean to let you or any living creature know a word of this. I thought that if I *was* a fool, I could keep my folly to myself. I don't know how I came to let it slip; I'm sorry I did, and that's enough about it."

"Don't be sorry, Ray," said Geoffrey, looking a little hurt. "Surely, you don't want me to *tell* you that it is as safe with me as if it had never passed your lips."

"I know that, old fellow," exclaimed Ray warmly, his impulsive heart reproaching him with having been ungracious towards his best friend. "Things are bad enough with me, Geoff; but the day would be a dark one when I felt I couldn't trust *you* through thick and thin."

And the two locked hands in a fast, firm grip, which gave a stronger assurance than words of good comradeship and loyal faith.

CHAPTER XIX.

"IT IS THE CAUSE!"

"So sprung the evil crop by evil sown."

THE look which he had noticed, though only for a moment, on Fitzallan's face, came back to Geoffrey again and again that night. He could not forget it; and his impression of it seemed somehow associated with the faint and hazy sense of reminiscence which he had experienced before on more than one occasion when he looked at Fitzallan. That gaze of dark and deadly malignity, the sinister gleam of those blue eyes, vaguely reminded him of something he had seen, but where and how he could not remember. Was it a picture—a living face—a dream, which that look recalled? He sought to trace out the memory, but it eluded him.

His sleep was disturbed by confused dreams. His ordinarily robust and splendid health had not been quite as vigorous as usual for the last two or three days; some trifling ailment had affected it. Dr. Treherne had given him a prescription for a draught—dose to be taken night and morning; and Geoffrey, who was very much astonished at having anything at all the matter with him, had made a wry face, but conscientiously obeyed directions.

Perhaps there was something in this medicine which tended to produce restlessness; anyhow, his sleep was troubled by broken dreams; at first they were, as dreams so often are, mere aimless wanderings of the brain, unguided by reason, through a maze of scattered fragments of what had been waking thoughts, scraps of new and old memories incongruously patched together; but through them all there ran a thread of consciousness of something unpleasant, something wrong with Ray, something in which Fitzallan was vaguely mixed up. They were shadowy dreams, clouded by a foreboding of evil, in which the sense of some disaster overhanging Ray grew clearer. Flitting glimpses of coffins and open graves figured in them, at first obscurely; then the uncertain twilight of dreamland seemed suddenly to brighten to broad daylight; and the dreamer could see what the danger was that threatened Ray. They had shut Ray into a coffin and were going to bury him alive; Fitzallan was busy fastening the lid down on him, and he, Geoffrey, must save him at once, or it would be too late. And now the dream grew clear as any waking perception; the impression was as vivid as it was horrible. He saw the coffin by the open grave; he saw Fitzallan, his back towards him and his head bent down, nailing up the lid; he heard Ray's voice, stifling, calling on him for help; he rushed forward to pull Fitzallan back and wrench off the lid, and, as he did so, Fitzallan turned his face, and it was the face of George Charcott—the convict, the thief and homicide, who had killed the old clerk who caught him robbing the safe—the face that Geoffrey had seen last in the dock when the prisoner received his sentence of penal servitude for life. Geoffrey had been in court then; and, young as he was at the time, he still remembered the sullen, malignant look of defiance with which the culprit listened to his sentence.

This was the face! He saw it now; he had not seen it so clearly in his mind's eye for many a day as now he saw it in his dream. And yet it was Fitzallan—the two were one! and that one evil being was shutting Ray down to be buried alive, stifled in the coffin. He seized the murderer; but it seemed that his own strong hands melted and were turned to air. The man did not feel his grasp. In vain he strove to grapple—to wrestle with him! There was no substance in his hands, they were but as shadows—immaterial, impalpable. In vain he put forth all his strength; it was but the ghost of a grasp, and powerless against the material body.

He struggled in the horrible consciousness that he was *nothing*—that what seemed to him his own body was empty, impalpable air—and in the struggle he woke, icy cold and shuddering.

It was a nightmare, he said to himself; but the impression it had made upon him was deeper than that which any mere nightmare could produce. When he fell asleep again, again he dreamt the same ghastly dream. The one weak point in

Geoffrey's healthy, sensible, practical nature was his superstitious inclination to attach importance to his dreams. He had found them "come true," as he tersely put it, so often, that it had disposed him to accept them, if they were in any way remarkable or impressive, as trustworthy indications or foreshadowings. This dream of all dreams possessed him as no dream had ever done before. Was *this* the clue to the faint and misty feeling of perplexed reminiscence which that look of Fitzallan's had roused in him? Was this man's face indeed the time-altered face of George Charcott—those the eyes whose sinister flash had struck his boyish imagination as, seated by his father's side, he had stared at the prisoner in the dock, twenty years and more ago! He remembered now clearly that George Charcott's eyes were coldly and brightly blue, and that the change in their expression when they darkened with that sullen and defiant look of vindictive resentment, had impressed him strongly at the time. That same startling change from their ordinary clear tranquillity he had seen in Dr. Fitzallan's cold blue eyes this night.

And then about Ray? Geoffrey did not interpret his dreams literally—he took them rather as signs; but it seemed to him as if this vision must portend some danger to Ray—some trouble in which Fitzallan would be instrumental—some serious disaster, involving perhaps his liberty if not his life, in which Geoffrey, anxious to be of assistance, would strive in vain to help him. He felt uneasy, and for a few moments almost wished that his arrangements for the day had been different. He was going out for the day, indeed it might almost be said for a part of the night too, as the train by which he proposed to return to Meriton was a late and slow one, and he would probably not get back to Hygeia Hall until all the establishment, save the night-porter, had gone to bed. He was going to lunch with an old college friend at Honeymere, then on with him to Essex Court to look at some horses which were for disposal there; the stud was being sold off on account of the late master's death, and Geoffrey had heard such a report of two of the saddle-horses there that he thought, if they came up to the description, they would just do for himself and May. After inspecting the Essex Court stables, he and Doveton were going on further by train to Lingley, to dine and spend the evening with the Squire of Lingley, another old and mutual acquaintance. He had made these three engagements for the one day so as to get them all over together, and be only one clear day apart from May, instead of breaking up three days. As he glanced round the breakfast-room, it seemed to him strange to see Dr. Fitzallan and his wife, and Ray, all looking exactly as usual, with not a tell-tale gleam of expression in any one of the three faces to hint at any dangerous under-current beneath the smooth, even-flowing surface.

He could not help gazing again and again at Fitzallan, and his

suspicion swung like a pendulum to and fro between conviction and doubt. He had often seen George Charcott in his boyhood, and could now recall the more clearly for his dream that smooth, beardless young face, fair-haired, fair-skinned, fresh-coloured and blue-eyed. He could see that face in his mind's eye as he looked at Fitzallan now—the middle-aged doctor, with his paled, tanned and weatherbeaten complexion, hair of peculiar whitish grey or flaxen white, black eyebrows and grey beard. Hair might be bleached or faded, eyebrows dyed, fair skin tanned, and smooth face bearded—yes, all those changes might easily be; and the eyes—the steel-blue eyes, with their curious transitions of expression—were the same. The general cast of features, too, was similar, he could see now, although the most characteristic part of the face was hidden by the heavy beard and moustache. Could it be? He knew not what to think nor what to do. He did not get a word alone with Ray until some time after breakfast, and then only by catching him as he was crossing the courtyard, and beckoning him into the back parlour.

"I say, Ray," he began, plunging into the subject abruptly, "don't you be going out anywhere alone with Fitzallan to-day, and mind what you're up to with——" Ray's warning frown and glance reminded him that it was unsafe to mention names in the public drawing-rooms with their open doors and *portières*, and he substituted: "in that quarter."

"I certainly don't hanker after *tête-à-tête* walks with *him*," said Ray; "what do you mean, Geoff?"

"Well, I'd a queer dream," Geoffrey admitted. "Look here, Ray, I feel sure that fellow will be up to some mischief if you're not careful——"

A rustle of feminine dress in the conservatory, approaching steps and voices, interrupted them.

Ray had only time to reply with a hasty reassurance: "It's all right, old fellow, I'll be careful, no fear!" when Kate and Eileen appeared at the window.

"Oh, there you are, Ray," said Kate. "Momie wants you a minute," and she carried Ray off.

"Where's May, Eily?" inquired Geoffrey.

"In the orangery with Mr. Bartram and Dr. Treherne."

Geoffrey set off promptly to join his liege lady, forgetful of Eileen, and a little aggrieved that May should be with any one but him this morning, when he was going out for all the rest of the day; but on the way he caught a glimpse of Dr. Fitzallan in the reading-room, and a sudden impulse moved him not to go out and leave the place for so many hours without doing something to set this doubt at rest one way or the other. He would spare a few minutes from his love for this purpose; and he turned into the reading-room.

"Cold morning, doctor, isn't it?" he observed, and by a stroke

of unwonted policy—for the slightest finesse was, as a rule, unknown to Geoffrey Carresford—he took up a position with his back to the window, so that Fitzallan, in turning towards him to respond, stood full face to the light. Geoffrey gazed at him fixedly, searchingly, his intent regard so betraying his interest that Fitzallan looked at him questioningly in return, with that faint suggestion of daring and defiance in his glance which was sometimes perceptible when his eyes met Geoffrey Carresford's full and straight.

Geoffrey answered the unspoken interrogation of his look.

"Curious, how sudden reminiscences strike one! A likeness has just struck me in you—an odd sort of likeness to that George Charcott, whom I think you've heard us mention."

"Hardly a flattering resemblance, is it?" Fitzallan rejoined.

He met Geoffrey's gaze with cold and challenging impenetrability. He held every feature in stern control, and even if the sensitive muscles about the mouth seemed somehow stiffened, the heavy moustache and beard veiled them. But he could not command the steely ominous gleam that leapt from his eyes and seemed to darken and chill their vivid blue, nor prevent his ordinary sallow paleness from fading to a sicklier, greyer shade.

As Geoffrey noted his face his suspicion deepened. True, no man would *like* to be compared to a convicted robber and murderer, but a man need not turn an ashen-greyish colour at the suggestion, nor need he look more defiant than surprised or curious.

"It is curious the likeness never struck you before," Fitzallan added.

"Yes, it *is* curious," Geoffrey admitted deliberately; "but it did not strike me until something recalled it."

Fitzallan's eyes flashed a half-startled challenge. What "something" could Carresford possibly allude to?

"It has sometimes happened to me to be likened to other people," he observed, "but I don't remember ever being likened to a convict before. I'm glad, however, it is a dead one I resemble. Likeness to a living one might be disagreeable."

His indifference of tone was very well done.

"Yes, it was supposed that Charcott was drowned," replied Carresford. He was not a good actor, and could not force himself to speak lightly; there was a serious look on his frank face.

"Ah, was he? Well, then it is clear he was not born to be hanged."

"People can escape from drowning more easily than from hanging."

"Sometimes. You seem to be interested in this Charcott, dead or alive! But I am sure you will pardon me if I suggest that—"

he lightly shrugged his shoulders as he added, "well, the supposed resemblance being hardly a flattering one—I should be obliged if you would refrain from commenting upon it before my wife."

"I will certainly oblige you so far—for the present," said Geoffrey briefly. He was standing meditatively pulling his fair moustache with a troubled look. He caught a momentary flicker in Fitzallan's eye which forcibly suggested to him that if they two had been alone in a solitary cave or secluded wood, instead of in a public parlour with an open door, it would not have been prudent for him to turn his back or be off his guard in any way.

"You are going out for the day, I believe?" remarked Fitzallan, abruptly changing the subject; and Geoffrey, albeit not imaginative, could not but feel in the very atmosphere how sincerely gratified Fitzallan would be if that "going out" meant never coming back!

"Yes," he replied laconically; "I have not much time to spare."

"Do not let me detain you," said Fitzallan politely; and Geoffrey had no wish to be detained. He left Fitzallan with a cool bow. As he drew near the orangery he heard a babble of laughing voices, May's clear, gay tones ringing among the rest. He felt in no mood to join that chattering, laughing group immediately; he was disturbed and troubled by the discovery which he believed himself to have made. He turned aside into the writing-room, which happened to be empty, and sat down there thinking, pondering.

Could he venture to be quite sure? Did a likeness first recognized in a dream—a change of colour—a defiant glance—make up conclusive evidence?

In his heart he was convinced, yet he felt he was bound to give Fitzallan the benefit of the doubt; moreover, he hated to admit the belief that an escaped felon, a convicted murderer, had dared to intrude into his family circle, to steal under false colours the friendship of his sisters, to desecrate their pure and peaceful home with his polluted presence. Then this villain had worked on his sister Mary's innocence and good nature, and induced her to allow him to obtain an influence over Eileen which should be trusted in the hands of none but a man of the purest, unblemished honour and integrity. It enraged and revolted Geoffrey to reflect that his little cousin Eileen—that sweet gentle child—had been subjected to such an influence at the will of such a man! And there was Ray—poor foolish boy—infatuated about this convict's wife, if this indeed were truly George Charcott and none other?

Yet, could he be so daring as to push himself into the Carresford family, when it was in the attempt to rob their father's

safe that he had struck down Raymond Carresford's faithful old clerk?

Then an idea struck Geoffrey. If this were Charcott indeed, others would be able to identify him. There was one man in particular—an old employé of their family—one of the witnesses against the prisoner at the trial, who had known George Charcott well; and Geoffrey remembered now—it came back to him like a flash—that he had heard this Vincent Tolson speak of some mark on Charcott's neck. Geoffrey had been a lad, but Tolson a man—a little older than Charcott at the time of the trial—the man of men to be able to pronounce on this question of identity.

On the spur of the moment Geoffrey acted on this thought. He drew paper and inkstand towards him, and dashed off a letter to Vincent Tolson, asking him to come down to Meriton if he could, and if not to write a description of the mark on George Charcott's neck, as there was a man here who bore a striking resemblance to Charcott.

He did not see, as he bent over the writing-table, that Fitzallan, who trod silently as a wolf, passed along outside the half-open door.

He hurried his letter into an envelope, went out with it in his hand, threw it into the post-bag, and went in search of Lady May. He found her with Kate, who immediately and discreetly made an excuse to absent herself.

May greeted him with a playful reproach.

"You haven't been near me all the morning."

"I've been looking for you. I didn't want to see you with a pack of other people. And now that I have found you, and got you to myself for a minute at last, now give me a kiss, May."

"You have taken two," she observed demurely, but making no attempt to turn her pretty, piquante, softly-flushed and smiling face away.

"I may as well make it three, because I shan't have any more all day," he rejoined, suiting the action to the word.

"What time will you be home?" she asked.

"Not till you have all gone to bed. The trains are so awkward on that branch line, any one would think they were just specially arranged for the inconvenience of the public! To make anything of an evening at Lingley at all I can't get back before half-past two or three. It's an awful nuisance."

"What a long day it will be!" she said, with a little sigh of half-playful but half-earnest dissatisfaction.

"Will you miss me?" he asked, frankly delighted.

"Just a little!"

"Press Ray into service," he suggested laughingly, as a bright idea struck him—it would be a good thing if the combined charms of Kate and May could only keep that boy out of Mrs.

Fitzallan's way until he, Geoffrey, had a chance of seriously "talking to" him on the morrow!

"Ray's not *you*," she objected, pouting.

"It's the only day I shall be away from you, darling," he suggested consolingly, "until—until we shall be always together!"

May laughed at the Irish bull into which her sturdy Saxon lover had so perfectly unconsciously blundered.

"Do you mean to be many days away from me then?" she inquired.

Geoffrey smiled and looked delightedly amused at this idea; his annoyance and anxiety were melting away like morning mists in the sunshine of May's radiant presence. He took one more kiss, and then another, and then it was time for him to get ready to go.

All "his party" were gathered out in the hall to see him off, the "all" including Mrs. Fitzallan, but not the doctor. Geoffrey cast a rather doubtful glance at *her*; he was a little uncertain whether to regard her as a victim or as an accomplice; he was glad to see that Ray was not beside her, but beside Kitty. The dogcart was at the door to take him to the station. The day was fine and clear, and the winter sun shone on Geoffrey's fair, tawny hair as he stepped out into the frosty sunshine. Handsome, tall, fair and strong, a picture of splendid manhood in its prime, he looked back at the little group of his own people standing on the step to see him off, and waved his hand; and Lady May, lingering on the threshold to the last, watched her lover out of sight.

No sooner had he gone than Fitzallan joined the party. He strode across the hall towards them as he would have walked up to the muzzle of a levelled gun; his steady pulses leapt and stopped as he stood amongst them and looked from face to face, not knowing whether Carresford had spoken. He was almost instantly reassured by the smiles and laughing friendly words that greeted him on all sides. He looked first at Mrs. Percival; he knew her kindly, honest eyes could not deceive; they met his with her usual good-natured easy smile. Not a glance among them all was significant or curious. He was safe as yet! They soon dispersed in different directions. He watched them all out of sight; he found himself alone in the hall, not even a servant within view; the hall-porter was off duty for the nonce—gone on some errand. The post-bag was on a side table, partly screened by a tall vase of ferns and pampas grasses. It did not take Fitzallan a minute to steal a glance into it; the first letter that caught his sight, lying on the top of the heap, was addressed in Geoffrey's big bold handwriting to Vincent Tolson! The next minute that letter was in Fitzallan's pocket, and he was sauntering carelessly across the hall with a nonchalant air.

In the privacy of his own room, Asenath being safely out of the way, he read the letter. So it was as he had feared! Carresford's suspicion was no idle passing fancy; it was serious, deep-rooted, though how it had so suddenly taken root he could not guess.

A few minutes afterwards Asenath met her husband with his hat and overcoat on; he told her he was going out for a long walk—too far for her to accompany him. He set off alone, and took the most solitary path into the pine woods. He wanted to think, to face the position steadily, and a lonely walk offered him the best opportunity. He could always meditate best when walking; the measured rhythm of his steps seemed to help him to order and organize his thoughts, and he had reason to reflect and keep his mind cool and concentrated now.

The intercepting of the letter meant merely a brief respite from danger. Geoffrey Carresford's mere suspicion of his identity was all but fatal, backed as it was by his appeal to Tolson for confirmation—to Vincent Tolson, who could identify him beyond doubt, who knew the ineffaceable birth-mark on his neck. If this letter received no answer, Carresford would write again. Its suppression was a temporary reprieve—no more.

Carresford suspected him, and it was only a question of how long Carresford would keep his suspicion to himself; with his transparently-open and outspoken disposition, the probability was, not long. Why, indeed, should he shut the idea in his own heart as a secret? Then, to whom would he probably first confide it? The close comradeship between him and Ray Percival offered a prompt answer to that question. Geoffrey, on the most intimate and confidential terms with Ray, was little likely to keep his discovery from him.

At the thought of his secret being imparted to Ray Percival, Fitzallan stood still—quite still for some moments, and then walked on very slowly.

Yes, he saw the whole thing now! It unrolled itself before him, clear and plain in the broad daylight. Percival would denounce him to the authorities as an escaped convict, get him out of the way, and then—her husband safely consigned to a living death: "Lost to place and use, and name and fame!" powerless to defend his rights or avenge his wrongs—*then* what, or who, was there to stand between Ray and Asenath—Asenath alone, unguarded, unprotected, humiliated, alone in her wounded pride, with her tarnished name, the felon's worse than widowed wife!

It never occurred to him that if Percival really loved Asenath, in his very love for her would lie a hope of safety for her husband—that true love might be worked upon to keep silence for her sake, to leave her unhumiliated, undisgraced, to save her from the degradation of being a convict's wife. He never thought of seeking safety through Asenath—of appealing to his enemies to have

mercy on him after all these years for Asenath's sake. He did not realize that one word of entreaty from *her* would ensure Ray's silence; that Ray's influence over Geoffrey could seal Geoffrey's lips, and so he might be saved and freed from fear of both; and if he *had* realized this, he would not have stooped to owe his security to his enemies' clemency, nor put his trust in the word of honour of the robber who had stolen his wife's love and truth. He would not hold his wife before him as a shield! And Carresford and Percival were his enemies; he would not plead to *them*!

The wild boar, driven to bay, does not crouch for mercy. He kills while he can, and then—

"Dies in silence, biting hard
Among the dying hounds."

Two days ago he would not have suspected Asenath's purity and truth. Two days ago the discovery of Geoffrey's recognition, the danger of denunciation, bitter enough, would still have lacked this one last deadly drop of gall—the thought that if he left his wife now, he left her to Ray Percival! If there were any scruples left in her whom he had proved so unscrupulously false, he saw—and she would doubtless see—how she could save her conscience and keep up appearances by the simple, if tedious, course of returning to her own country, and there procuring a divorce by American law from her husband, as a felon sentenced for life. Then she could marry Percival; if, indeed, he then cared to marry her?

No; that should never be! He swore to himself an oath that if he were taken from her, at least he would never leave her to Ray Percival! He had never broken such an oath as now he solemnly swore. Such an oath he had registered once, that he would return to his own country one day, and then, under a new name and in a new character build up for himself a new life! And he had kept that vow as he would keep this.

If Percival denounced him to clear his own way to Asenath, at least he should never reach her—never gather the fruit for which he stretched out his hand. No man should conquer Gervas Fitzallan or George Charcott—*here*! No man should immure *him* in a death-in-life, and trample over his living grave to reach his wife.

One course he saw he could easily take; he could save himself by flight now, before Carresford had time to speak. He could escape, taking Asenath with him; could yield and surrender his ambition—give up his life's great resolve; break up the career he had so successfully started; fly as a failure; begin at the foot of the ladder to struggle up again; live humiliated, degraded in Asenath's eyes; lead the life again that he once had led, till

time and change had lulled him into a feeling of security! No! not while there was a loop-hole left, a chance of keeping his secret and saving his name would he confess himself by flight!

He was coming gradually to the point of seeing that there was one thing, and one only, which could save him from either the humiliation of flight or the danger of denunciation. He had saved himself by his interception of the letter from Vincent Tolson's arrival and identification. If anything were to happen to Geoffrey Carresford suddenly, at once, before he could speak to Ray Percival, *then* he might draw breath in safety again! For who, save Geoffrey, who seemed by some extraordinary chance to have recognized him at last, was likely to identify him? Tolson was never likely to cross his path now that Geoffrey's summons to him was stopped. Mrs. Percival had only seen him once for a brief passing glimpse, in her girlhood, and she evidently did not retain the faintest reminiscence of George Charcott. Ray and Gertrude were far too young to remember, even if they had ever, as children, seen him. It was a wonder that even Geoffrey could remember; and Geoffrey could not be quite certain without Vincent Tolson's confirmation. Were Geoffrey out of the way, Geoffrey's silence secured, he could take good care to avoid the Percivals. He would miss Eileen certainly—even at that moment he gave a passing thought to Eileen—but he would drift apart from the whole family. He would take Asenath out of Ray's way, and punish her according to his own will when he had got her safe in his power, alone; and if he found Ray following her, well, then it would be the worse for Ray, and for her, too!

Yes; if only Geoffrey Carresford never returned from this day's trip—never had the chance of speaking to Ray—then Fitzallan would feel safe again! Human life was to him no more than any other obstacle if it stood in his way. As a young man he had struck down without remorse the old clerk who crossed his path, and had felt, mingled with his first horror, a dart of half-savage pleasure in his easy victory as the old man fell. In his experiences in the wild and remote parts of California and Nevada, where he had spent years after his escape, he had learnt to hold life cheap. Once in the same week he had killed a bear and he had killed a man; and the two deaths had caused him no very different sensations. He had shot the man down like a dog, and felt nothing after it except a satisfaction in the accuracy with which he had sent the bullet home, and even a momentary thrill of fierce delight. If he could have got Geoffrey Carresford in the safe solitude of these pine woods now, and had his revolver with him, he would have stolen up behind him, and levelled the weapon at him as he would have taken aim at an animal. Even with his revolver he could have achieved his purpose, could he

only have caught him off guard and alone. But Carresford was safe out of his reach—safe in the public highways, not even alone there; secure in the society of his friends. To follow him would be useless. How could he reach him? How, without exposing himself to suspicion, take his enemy off guard and put him out of the way? There was the difficulty; nay, it seemed the impossibility!

Then suddenly a strange feeling came to him—it did not seem to spring from his own inner consciousness, but to be borne in upon him from without—a sense of conviction that the path would be made easy for him to the end he contemplated, if he resolved to act upon his thought. It was as if a voice had whispered, not to his ear but to his soul; it reached his brain without passing through the channels of the known senses—that if he desired to carry out the dream into the deed, it should be made possible; a way should be cleared for him to accomplish his purpose.

There are influences outside of man which can only affect him when they find affinity in his own soul. An evil thought often by its very existence draws the powers of evil to help it. Every evil desire, however silently, secretly born in the heart, is *en rapport* with the unseen and unknown elemental forces of evil with which the atmosphere is charged. Man has the free will to guard his soul against them; they cannot cross the threshold uninvited. But the frail, unspoken, newborn thought, even as it springs into being, is strong enough to open the door to the powers of Darkness, and Ahriman is strong to help his own.

The Spirit of Evil goes about in very truth “seeking whom he may devour,” but he goes silently; and silently as electricity passes through the smooth conducting-rod, he passes into the human soul through the conductor of its own thought. And never was soul more open for the demon to enter in and possess it than was the soul of Gervas Fitzallan this day. Yesterday the door would not have been flung open quite so wide. A certain affinity with evil was always latent in him (and it was her unconscious recognition of this that had closed Asenath’s heart against him); but yesterday it had been slumbering, inactive, before he had met those stranger tourists at the Red Dragon inn. Their chance words were “shafts at random sent” which had found mark in the core of his heart, and slain there the only feeling that might have kept him human, in touch with his kind, to-day! Ambition, taking form in the desire to stand well in his native country, to which he had so daringly returned, pride in the powers on which he relied to win him the position he desired, had been his master-passion. This was the central purpose of his mind, as the best and purest feeling of his heart had been his faith in Asenath—a cold and grudging, fault-finding faith, but firm in it—mingled with the occasional flashes of his cooler extinct, passion for her, made up his regard.

something that came as near love as he was capable of feeling.

Now all the passions of his nature poured into one channel. Self-preservation and jealousy alike urged him to destroy the enemy who would put it into the power of a still more hated foe to destroy *him* and rob him of his wife.

When he returned to Hygeia Hall at last, that curious presentiment that he would be *helped*, that some power would work with him to his enemy's destruction, had taken firm possession of him. Was it only that the desire was father to the thought? Had any devil but his own jealous, revengeful and vindictive passions entered into the darkness of his soul?

As he passed along one of the back-paths, which was separated by a thin fringe of shrubbery from the stable-yard, he heard from one of the out-houses nearest to the shrubbery the piteous howls and yelps of a dog in pain, and the familiar voices of the Percivals in tones of lamentation and compassion.

"Oh, poor, *poor* Ponto!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival. "Oh, Ray! I can't bear to hear the poor thing! Oh, do have him shot!"

"Poor, dear Ponto!" Eileen said tearfully. "Oh, Ray, is it more cruel to let the poor dog suffer so, or to have him killed?"

Then Ray's voice struck in clearly:

"I won't have any one else kill old Ponto, and I won't have him shot. A bullet's uncertain. I've seen animals shot, and they didn't always die at once. Robert Graeme had his mastiff killed the other day in a second—just dropped dead in an instant—by hydrocyanic acid. I'll get some of that, and put the poor beast out of his misery."

"How can you get it, dear? Perhaps Dr. Treherne has got some, and would let you have a dose," suggested his mother.

"Dr. Treherne is out, has gone out to lunch," said Eileen.

"I'll go to the chemist's," said Ray.

Fitzallan heard thus far; and the presentiment strengthened, as an idea, hazy, nebulous, and shapeless at present, came into his mind. He heard Ray's footsteps cross the stable-yard; and he hastened along the path, and turned into another by which he calculated he should just meet Ray at the outer gate, and did as he anticipated encounter him there.

"I heard a dog yelping as if badly hurt," Fitzallan observed; "not your dog, Mr. Percival, I hope?"

"Yes, it is my poor dog," said Ray, who was looking really troubled. "He has been run over; I'm afraid it's all up with the poor beast; the wheels went right over him and smashed his ribs. I'm going now to get some hydrocyanic acid to put him out of pain. I'd give anything to save him; but it is hopeless, and I

can't let him linger in agony. That stuff—hydrocyanic acid—the quickest poison, isn't it?"

"There is nothing that I know of quicker," replied Fitz-allan.

(To be continued.)

BÉRANGER.

THE FRENCH BURNS.

By JOSEPH FORSTER.

BÉRANGER was born on the 19th August, 1780, at the house of his grandfather, a tailor. His first names were Peter John—apostolic names rather appropriate to a poet who had a distinct message to deliver, and who was not afraid to deliver it in the most emphatic and caustic manner. His father was a witty, clever, energetic man, who had the impudence not to be satisfied with his wretched condition, and despite of the prayer book and the priests, who are, of course, never ambitious themselves, tried to rise to something higher and better.

He made some claim to a noble ancestry, but our poet laughed at such pretensions and gloried in being one of the people, as we shall hear presently in one of his best songs, "Le Vilain."

He lived with his grandfather, the tailor, nine years, and witnessed the taking of the Bastille. Forty years later, in 1829, he was imprisoned in La Force jail for celebrating that event in terms too glowing for the long ears of Charles X. and his flunkys. A short time after the glorious Bastille day he was sent to his aunt, who lived at Péronne and kept a public house there. She was very good to the boy and fostered his young genius, and, I am glad to say, lived to be proud of it. This aunt had copies of Fénélon, Racine and Voltaire, which the boy eagerly devoured.

From his aunt he received much pious and moral instruction. The religious teaching did not appear to cling to the bright, sharp, sarcastic boy. On one occasion he was rendered senseless by a thunderstorm which struck the house. At the beginning of the storm his aunt had sprinkled the threshold and room with holy water of the best quality. When the boy recovered his senses he said to his aunt, "What was the good of the holy water you threw about? It did not save me!" At about this time the fiery strains of the "Marseillaise" fired our young poet's blood.

At fourteen years of age Béranger entered the printing house of M. Laisné, and there he first learnt the rules of grammar. But the school to which he owed most was that of M. Ballue de Bellanglise, ancient deputy of the Chamber. This gentleman was an

enthusiastic admirer of Rousseau, and endeavoured to carry out his principles of education. The boys wore a military costume; at each great public event they named deputations, delivered addresses, made speeches, and wrote to Robespierre or Tallien. Young Béranger was the orator, and wrote the best addresses. These exercises awakened his taste, helped to form his style, extended his knowledge of history and geography, and in addition made him take an interest in public events, and thus married his ardent young heart to his beloved country. But, dreadful to relate, no one taught him Latin, and worse still, he proved his possession of genius without it; that was perhaps better than proving his pedantry and stupidity with it. Béranger studied French translations of the great Greek and Latin authors, and it appears to me that he thoroughly mastered their spirit, without slavishly copying their forms. Then his study of Montaigne, the immortal Rabelais, Molière and La Fontaine had been profound: their influence is perceptible in every page he has written.

At seventeen Béranger, furnished with the excellent moral teachings of his good aunt, and with his intellectual faculties thoroughly alive, returned to his father in Paris.

At eighteen our young poet felt the desire to write verse steal into his heart. This desire was awakened by a visit he paid to the theatre. He wrote a satirical comedy, where he laughed at coxcombs and fools, and at vain and affected women. But his appreciation of Molière and La Fontaine was too keen for him not to realize that his work was very poor stuff. So like a fine gritty fellow he set to work again to study these masters of satire and comedy, analyzing every little trait and detail, till he was able to divine and appreciate his own talent.

Still his dramatic attempts served their end; in my opinion they gave that racy, vivid, dramatic character to his poems which renders them quite unique in literature. Like La Fontaine's fables, Béranger's best songs are delightful little plays. But the boy was too young to be a satirist. He thought he would write an epic poem: Clovis was the hero he chose. The preparation for the gigantic task would take years; but in the meantime he felt the bitter grip of poverty and hunger. He thought then of becoming a soldier, but fortunately was dissuaded from carrying out that project. But this bitter time had its sweet compensations. He lived in a garret, it is true, but he made friends with the people; he turned his coat when one side was too shabby; but he learnt the hard, cruel facts of life, and how to do very well on very little. Some of his brightest poems were written during that time of privation. In the garret many friends met, and the laughter was louder and heartier, and better-natured, too, than the polite snigger one hears in conventional drawing-rooms. The good temper, the many interests, the good opinion genius has of itself and the contempt it cannot help feeling for respectable windbags

and humbugs, made Béranger's poverty a thousand times happier than the dull, bovine pleasures of rich snobs.

When the poet was an old man, in writing to a lady friend, he says of these days of his youth, outwardly so hard, "At that time I was so poor that a day's pleasure cost me eight days' fast. Still, in thinking of those old times when, without help—often without daily bread—without instruction, I dreamt of future fame, but did not neglect the little pleasures of to-day, my eyes overflow with tears. Oh, what a beautiful thing is youth, when it can spread its charm even over old age, that time so disenchanted and so poor! Employ well that which remains to you, my dear friend. Love and let yourself be loved. I have known that happiness; it is the greatest in life."

Béranger was drawn from his poverty by the hand of Lucien Buonaparte, brother of the First Consul. This was one cause for the liking he had for the family, in which I can't agree with him.

Chateaubriand's genius had great influence on Béranger, so great that he wrote a religious poem on the Deluge and other scriptural subjects. I need not say that our caustic, witty, genial poet did not shine in these efforts. But no one could shine in the Deluge: it would be too damp. Conversing one day with an Academician and poet, Béranger said that when he wrote of the sea, he called it the sea and not the realm of Neptune, and did not even once mention Amphitrite, Tethys and Co.

The Academician was lost in astonishment at the holdness of a man who dared to leave out the names sacred to conventional poetry.

Thanks to a friend, Béranger was made clerk to the university, and occupied this post, which produced him 2,000 francs yearly, for ten years.

In 1821 his political poems cost him his situation.

But this is rather anticipating. The 2,000 francs (£80) satisfied amply the simple wants of Béranger. He understood the Spartan lesson, that to preserve one's independence it is necessary to learn to simplify one's wants. A crust of bread and a glass of wine sufficed for him. He sang like a bird, and could live on nearly as little. Not that he did not like good cheer, but he was equal to either fortune: master of fortune instead of her slave. But our friend Béranger was a terrible fellow. He was like a bull in a china shop. He thought nothing at all of making fun of kings, princes, senators, as we shall hear presently, aye, of bishops, cardinals, and even of the pope himself. He had the supreme audacity of preferring a poor, honest man to a rich, greasy rascal. What an awful man! I almost feel my hair stand on end! Smug, canting respectability made him angry. No wonder he lost his place, poor as it was. He looked every one he met full in the eyes; and people with fishy, dishonest, mean eyes did not like the keen, flashing

glance of our sarcastic poet. He gave a man just the amount of respect or scorn he was entitled to—no more and no less; so that every charlatan, humbug and fool was his bitter enemy. And when we come to consider how many charlatans, humbugs and fools there are in this world, one can imagine that Béranger lived and died a poor man; in fact he was locked up by the rogues for being honest. Now a few words about his personal appearance. He was a little man, his figure not much to speak of; but his head was superb. The intellectual and distinguished brow marked him out at once as a king of men: his eyes were piercingly bright—full of fire, humour and tenderness; his mouth was large, the lips full, and I must admit, sensual—sweet or caustic, according to circumstances; the mouth in fact of a richly endowed man of genius. Indeed I don't know a finer head and face, or a countenance displaying more genius, rich humour and wit, than Béranger's.

The poets and wits of the Cave received Béranger as a member in 1813. At this time he wrote some of his highly-spiced poems, such as the "Infidelities of Lisette," the "Orgies," the "Bacchante," &c. He had not at that time discovered his true mission, which was to sing, as no one had sung before, the joys and sorrows of the people, and to introduce a distinct dramatic element into popular song. It was some years before he ventured, when at table with some literary friends, to sing one of these songs. He began with a faltering voice, but the passionate applause which greeted his effort taught him where his chief strength lay. He never forgot that lesson. Invitations to the gilded *salons* of fashion, to the court itself were refused; and he became the poet of the French people, putting into beautiful verse, full of wit, genius and tenderness, their hopes, their sorrows and their aspirations, not to mention their bitter contempt for hypocrites and flunkeys. The public loved his songs so passionately that when his first collection was printed, the people knew them already by heart. A new song was passed from hand to hand, committed to memory and sung in the streets, until it was known by everybody.

Five editions of Béranger's works were published during his life; the first in 1815, the second in 1821, the third in 1825, the fourth in 1828, and the fifth 1835. The first edition was very racy and gay; the third edition, which appeared during the ministry of M. de Villelle, and the fifth did not cause the prosecution of Béranger. The edition of 1821, however, attacked by M. de Marchangy, cost our poet three months' imprisonment; that of 1828 sent him to jail for nine months. While the poet was behind the bars of his prison, the people were singing his songs under them and throughout France, in spite of the tender susceptibilities of those in power. So that while the beloved defender of the rights and liberties of the people was in jail, their betrayers, the slaves of power, were in palaces. I would rather have been

the poet. I will now introduce to the reader's notice some of Béranger's songs, using the capital versions of John Oxenford.

I have tried to arrange the poems selected in a way that, I trust, will illustrate the life of the poet of the French people, the French Burns, and teach us to love truth more, and trust kings, courtiers and priests less than ever.

The first song was composed during the early part of our poet's career, and is addressed to his coat.

My poor old coat, be faithful to the end :
 We both grow old ; ten years have gone,
 Through which my hand has brushed thee, ancient friend ;
 Not more could Socrates have done.
 Now weakened to a threadbare state,
 Thou still must suffer many a blow ;
 E'en like thy master, brave the storms of fate ;
 My good old coat, we'll never part—Oh, no !

I still can well remember the first day
 I wore thee, for my memory's strong ;
 It was my birthday, and my comrades gay
 Chanted thy fashion in a song.
 Thy poverty might make me vain ;
 The friends who loved me long ago,
 Though thou art poor, will drink to thee again ;
 My good old coat, we'll never part—Oh, no !

This fine-drawn rent—its cause I'll ne'er forget ;
 It beams upon my memory still :
 I feigned one night to fly from my Lisette,
 And even now her grasp I feel.
 She tore thee, but she made more fast
 My fetters, while she wronged me so ;
 Then two whole days in mending thee she past :
 My dear old coat, we'll never part—Oh, no !

Ne'er drugged with musk and amber hast thou been,
 Like coats by vapid coxcombs worn ;
 Ne'er in an antechamber wert thou seen,
 Insulted by some lordling's scorn.
 How slavishly all France has eyed
 The hands that ribbons can bestow !
 The field-flower is thy ornament and pride,—
 My good old coat, we'll never part—Oh, no !

We shall not have those foolish days again,
 When our two destinies were one ;
 Those days so full of pleasure and of pain ;
 Those days of mingled rain and sun.
 I somehow think, my faithful friend,
 That to a coatless realm I go ;
 Yet wait awhile, together we will end,—
 My good old coat, we'll never part—Oh, no !

The next song is one of Béranger's best, and is entitled

MY VOCATION.

Flung down upon this earth,
Weak, sickly, ugly, small ;
Half stifled by the mob,
And pushed about by all ;
I utter heavy sighs,
To Fate complaints I bring,
When lo ! kind Heaven cries,
" Sing, little poet, sing."

The gilded cars of state,
Bespattering, pass me by ;
None from the haughty great
Have suffered more than I.
I feel my bosom rise
Against the venomed sting,
But still kind Heaven cries,
" Sing, little poet, sing."

In early days I learned
A doubtful life to dread,
And no employment spurned
To earn my daily bread.
Though liberty I prize,
My stomach claims can bring ;
Yet still kind Heaven cries,
" Sing, little poet, sing."

Sweet love has often deigned
My poverty to cheer ;
But now my youth has waned,
I see its flight is near.
Stern beauties now despise
The tribute I can bring ;
Yet still kind Heaven cries,
" Sing, little poet, sing."

To sing—or I mistake—
Is my appointed task ;
Those whom to joy I wake,
To love me may I ask ?
With friends to glad my eyes,
With wine my heart to wing,
Kind Heaven still to me cries,
" Sing, little poet, sing."

Now for a song where Béranger strikes with a strong, nervous hand a sterner, stronger chord, and shows how revolutions are brought about and justified.

JACK.

Jack ! wake from your slumber if you can,
For here's a fellow tall and stout,
Who through the village sniffs about :
He's coming for your tax, poor man.
So out of bed, Jack, quickly spring,
And pay the taxes of the king.

The sun is up—why thus delay ?
You never were so hard to waken.
Old Remi's furniture they've taken
For sale, before the close of day.
So out of bed, Jack, quickly spring,
And pay the taxes of the king.

By these hard taxes, poor as rats,
Unhappy wretches we are made :
My distaff only, and your spade,
Keep us, my father, and our brats.
So out of bed, Jack, quickly spring,
And pay the taxes of the king.

Our land, with this small hovel, makes
A quarter acre—they are sure ;
The poor man's tears are its manure,
And usury the harvest takes.
Our work is hard, our gain so small,
We ne'er shall taste of meat, I fear.
For food has grown so very dear,
With everything—the salt and all.

A drink of wine new heart might bring ;
But then the wine is taxed as well ;
Still, never mind, love, go and sell.
To buy a cup, my wedding-ring.
Dream you of wealth, of some good change,
That fate at last its grip relaxes ?
What to the wealthy are the taxes ?
Mere mice that nibble in the grange.
So out of bed, Jack, quickly spring,
And pay the taxes of the king.

He comes ! O, heavens ! what must I fear ?
Your cheek is pale, no word you say ;
You spoke of suffering yesterday,
You, who so much in silence bear.
She calls in vain—extinct is life.
For those whom labour has worn out,
A welcome end is death, no doubt :
Pray, all good people, for his wife.
So out of bed he could not spring,
He paid his tax to Death, the king.

I have ventured to alter the last two lines.

In the following most dramatic and powerful poem, Béranger shows his sympathy with Napoleonic ideas ; but I think it was written to express his loathing of the Bourbons more than his love of Napoleon.

An old soldier, one of the Grand Army, has been insulted by a young sprig of nobility : the veteran strikes him and is condemned to death. He is being led to execution.

THE OLD CORPORAL.

Come, gallant comrades, move apace ;
 With shouldered musket march away ;
 I've got my pipe and your embrace,
 So quickly give me my *congé*.
 Too old I in the service grew,
 But rather useful I could be
 As father of the drill to you.
 March merrily,
 And do not weep,
 Or sadly creep ;
 No, comrades ! march on merrily.

An officer—an upstart swell—
 Insulted me—I broke his head ;
 I'm to be shot—he's getting well :
 Your corporal will die instead.
 My wrath and brandy fired me so,
 I cared for nought—and then, d'ye see,
 I served the great man long ago.

Young conscripts—you, I'm sure, will not
 Lose arms or legs a cross to get ;
 The cross you see me wear I got
 In wars, where kings were overset.
 You willingly would stand a drink,
 Old battle-tales to hear from me ;
 Still, glory's something, I must think.

You, Robert, who wert born and bred
 In mine own village—mind your sheep ;
 Soon April will its beauties shed,
 And garden trees cast shadows deep.
 At dawn of day I've sought the wood,
 And, oh, what pleasures fell to me !
 My mother lives—well, Heaven is good !
 March merrily,
 And do not weep,
 Or slowly creep ;
 But, old friends, march on merrily.

Who is it that stands blubb'ring there ?
 Is it the drummer's widow, pray ?
 In Russia, through the icy air,
 Her son I carried, night and day ;

Else, like his father, in the snows
 They both had died—her child and she :
 She's praying for me, I suppose.
 March merrily,
 And do not weep,
 Or sadly creep ;
 But, comrades, march on merrily.

Hang it ! my pipe has just gone out ;
 No, no, I'm merry—so ne'er mind.
 This is our journey's end, no doubt :
 My eyes, I pray you, do not bind.
 Be careful, friends—don't fire too low :
 I'm grieved so troublesome to be ;
 Good-bye—to heaven I hope you'll go.
 March on merrily,
 And do not weep,
 Or sadly creep ;
 But, comrades, march on merrily.

The following poem, in quite another key, was written during the Restoration, and recalls the sanguine hopes of the enthusiastic boy-poet. The poem is supposed to be addressed to the actress who impersonated the Goddess of Reason, then young and fascinating, now old and wrinkled.

THE GODDESS.

And is it you, who once appeared so fair,
 Whom a whole people followed to adore,
 And, thronging after your triumphant chair,
 Called you by her great name whose flag you bore ?
 Flushed with the acclamations of the crowd,
 Conscious of beauty (you were fair to see),
 With your new glory you were justly proud,
 Goddess of Liberty !

Over the Gothic ruins as you passed,
 Your train of brave defenders swept along ;
 And in your pathway flow'ry wreaths were cast,
 While virgins' hymns mixed with the battle song.
 I, a poor orphan, in misfortune bred—
 For fate her bitterest cup allotted me—
 Cried, " Be a parent in my mother's stead,
 Goddess of Liberty ! "

Foul deeds were done that glorious time to shame ;
 But that—a simple child—I did not know
 I felt delight to spell my country's name,
 And thought with horror of the foreign foe.
 All armed against the enemy's attack ;
 We were so poor, but yet we were so free.
 Give me those happy days of childhood back,
 Goddess of Liberty !

Like a volcano, which its ashes flings
 Until its fire is smothered by their fall,
 The people sleep; the foe his balance brings,
 And says, "We'll weigh thy treasure, upstart Gaul."
 When to high Heaven our drunken vows we paid,
 And worship e'en to beauty dared decree,
 You were our dream—the shadow of a shade,
 Goddess of Liberty!

Again I see you—time has fled too fast.
 Your eyes are lustreless and loveless now;
 And when I speak about the glorious past,
 A blush of shame o'erspreads your wrinkled brow.
 Still be consoled; you did not fall alone.
 Though lost thy youth, car, altar, flowers may be,
 Virtue and glory too are with thee gone,
 Goddess of Liberty!

So that if the Revolution was stained with crime, the Restoration was altogether infamous. The following rollicking song was written in May, 1813, and is full of genial satire.

THE KING OF YVETOT

There was a King of Yvetot,
 Who, little famed in story,
 Went soon to bed, to rise was slow;
 And slumbered without glory.
 'Twas Jenny crowned the jolly chap
 With nothing but a cotton cap,
 Mayhap.
 Ho! ho! ho! ho! ha! ha! ha! ha!
 What a famous king was he, oh la!

Within his thatched palace, he
 Consumed his four meals daily;
 He rode about his realm to see
 Upon a donkey, gaily;
 Besides his dog, no guard he had,
 He hoped for good when things were bad,
 Ne'er sad.
 Ho! ho! ho! ho! ha! ha! ha! ha!
 What a famous king was he, oh la!

No costly tastes his soul possessed,
 Except a taste for drinking,
 And kings who make their subjects blest,
 Should live well to my thinking;
 At table he his taxes got,
 From each one's cask he took a pot,
 I wot.
 Ho! ho! ho! ho! ha! ha! ha! ha!
 What a famous king was this, oh la!

With ladies too of high degree
 He was a fav'rite, rather,
 And of his subjects I suspect
 Rather too much a father.
 He never called out troops;

Except to shoot the target, and then
He called them all his men.

Ho! ho! ho! ho! ha! ha! ha! ha!
What a famous king was he, oh la!

He did not widen his estates
Beyond their proper measure;
A model of all potentates,
His only work was pleasure.
And 'twas not till the day he died,
His faithful subjects ever sighed
Or cried.
Ho! ho! ho! ho! ha! ha! ha! ha!
What a famous king was he, oh la!

This wise and worthy monarch's face
Is still in preservation,
And as a sign it serves to grace
An inn of reputation.
On holidays, a joyous rout
Before it push their mugs about
And shout,
Ho! ho! ho! ho! ha! ha! ha! ha!
What a famous king was he, oh la!

I will conclude my very imperfect sketch of Béranger, for whom I hope the reader feels a friendly interest, with, I think, one of the finest songs ever written; it is equal to the best of Burns's. I cannot say more, and it would be unjust to say less. I will venture to use my own version of "Le Vilain." The poet was sometimes spoken of as *de* Béranger.

LOW BORN.

So, I learn, some criticize
The *de* before my name;
Are you then of blue blood?
No! well I can say the same.
My humble name is of the lowest rank;
I have no haughty title deeds to show.
I love my country, that is all;
My birth was low, O, very low!

I should not have a *de* before my name,
Because if in my heart I read aright,
My fathers must have curst the power of kings;
In which, in truth, I don't delight.
I love my country, that is all;
My birth was low, O, very low!

My fathers never to despair drove the poor serf;
Never their noble swords have drunk the blood of unarmed men;
Never when tired of this have they
To dirty work of courts said their "amen!"
I love my country, that is all;
My birth was low, O, very low!

In civil wars my ancestors did not take part ;
They ne'er to their own land a foreign foe invited,
Nor when the church to crush the people tried,
To blacker deeds incited.
I love my country, that is all ;
My birth was low, O, very low !

Leave me alone is all I ask
Aristos with the turned-up nose ;
Nobles of the button hole,
Born legislators, go and doze !
I honour honest labour,
'Tis to pride I deal my blow,
I only bow to sorrow ;
For I am low, O, very low !
I love my country, that is all ;
My birth was low, O, very low !

THE THIRST OF THE RIVER GOD.

By MRS. FRANK PENNY.

ONE evening in February I was idling on the tennis courts at Trichinopoly, in South India, after the games were over. The men were gravitating towards the club, bent on refreshing themselves with iced drinks and whist; the ladies were sauntering about in couples, or sitting in groups under the trees. The sun had set in a blaze of orange light, and the hot fiery colour still bathed the sky and landscape, though it was fast mellowing into a rich warm purple with the rapidly advancing night of the tropics. I was very hot from the exertion of the game, and I plied my fan vigorously.

"You are just the person I want to see, Mrs. Haddow," said a voice at my elbow.

I turned and saw Mrs. Savile, the Collector's wife. She and I had been together in the station some two or three years, a long time for India. During that time our acquaintance had ripened into friendship, for we had many pursuits in common. She was fond of painting, so was I. She sang divinely and I played her accompaniments. We both devoured all the new books we could lay our hands upon, and talked them into shreds afterwards.

"What is it? A new song, a new book, or a new frock?" I asked.

"None of those fascinating subjects this time. I have a new idea in my head," she replied.

"Then hand it out at once. New ideas in this monotonous Indian life are as rare as angels' visits."

"I want you to come with us to see the new bridge and sluices over the river. They are being rebuilt, and there is some dispute about a bit of land. A small wayside temple stands in the way of one of the piers, and the people do not like to have it touched. My husband has to decide whether it must be removed, and he must go and see it."

"I shall be delighted to go. When and how shall we get there?"

"It is about fifteen miles from the town. We shall post a pair of horses and drive. Colonel Brevis, the superintending engineer, will go with us; and we propose staying the night at the engineer's bungalow, which is close to the bridge. Can you go to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, and as early as you like."

"Take your sketching things. There are some lovely bits for painting down there. And now come for a moonlight drive."

So away we went, speeding over the dusty roads towards the race-course, in search of a breeze.

Very early the next morning, long before daylight, I crept quietly from my bed so as not to disturb my husband. I dressed and breakfasted by lamplight, and hurried off to Mr. Savile's house, close by. The night air was sharp and heavy with dew. A beautiful planet shone like a miniature moon in the west, and the southern cross was just inclining towards its setting.

Mr. and Mrs. Savile were ready to start when I arrived, and the servants were bustling about in the darkness of the morning, swinging lanterns recklessly in their hands as they passed up cloaks and shawls into the carriage. We got in without delay, as every moment before the rising of the sun was precious. The horsekeepers stood aside, and the strong, well-fed Australian horses sprang impatiently forward to their work. As we passed under the big banyan trees that bordered the drive, a green parrot fluttered in the leaves above and called to his fellows to awake. I looked towards the east and saw a faint gleam of light on the low flat horizon. We left the well-kept, respectable cantonment behind and reached the sleeping town. The roads became narrower and more dusty, and were bordered by low mud houses. Through the dim light of dawn I could distinguish the slumbering forms of the natives, wrapped in dirty sheets and lying in the happy oblivion of deep slumber, by the side of the foul drains that ran the length of the streets. The air of the thickly populated town was unwholesome and foetid, and it was a relief to the senses when the rivery Cauvery was reached and the city passed.

We crossed by the bridge which had stood many a flood, and found ourselves in the sacred Island of Srirungam.

Just before the river reaches Trichinopoly it divides into two noble channels, each half a mile wide, and forms an elongated island of wondrous fertility. At the head and foot of the island, where the stream parts and rejoins, there are enormous sluices, which regulate the flow of water in June and December. Twice a year this Nile of India, which is said by the credulous natives to have its source in the sacred fount of the Ganges, pours down a big volume of water, some twenty-five feet deep—a brown whirling flood that carries fertility in its waters in the shape of a rich alluvial deposit. Every drop that passes through the sluices is utilized. A vast network of channels carries it over thousands of acres, and leaves nothing for the devouring sea.

After passing the bridge, the road turned sharply to the right, and we drove by paddyfields, cocoanut plantations, gardens of betel-nut leaf, plantains and sugar-cane, and under avenues of tamarinds and banyans. The carriage lights were extinguished, for the sun

would soon mount above the horizon, dispelling the pale blue mists conjured up in the night and the dewy haze that overspread the rich, flat landscape. At the half-way point we found fresh horses, and in another hour we arrived at our destination.

We were all hungry and glad to find hot coffee, toast and eggs awaiting us. The servants, sent on overnight, had everything prepared. After a hurried meal we started out to see the bridge. Colonel Brevis and Mr. Savile, accompanied by the engineer in charge of the works, went to examine the arches, some of which were already built, and others were in course of construction. Mrs. Savile and I, feeling disinclined to walk in the sun, sat down under a shady tamarind tree on the river bank and prepared to sketch.

"We will walk this evening, after sundown," said Mrs. Savile in answer to her husband's invitation to accompany him to the works.

The gentlemen were gone a long time. In the fascination of the work they forgot the sun, which in the south of India bears very great power in February, the heat, and the glare of the sand. So we strolled back to the bungalow. We bathed, changed our warm frocks for cooler ones, and prepared ourselves to spend a long day. From the windows of the bungalow we could see up the river. The Fort Rock, at Trichinopoly, crowned with its heathen temple, stood on the horizon like a sentinel guarding the precious stream. A silvery streak of water wound its serpentine course through the broad, gleaming bed of sand. Here and there, still pools—the home of the hideous mugger or alligator—shone with dazzling light reflected from the sky. The low banks were fringed with pampas grass and graceful palms; and herds of buffaloes wended their way slowly down towards the water, sinking knee-deep in the hot, dry, loose sand.

Colonel Brevis, Mr. Savile and the engineer returned to the bungalow at eleven, very hot and sunburnt, and very thankful for cold baths and a substantial breakfast.

"You ladies must really make an effort to get as far as the sluices this evening. They are well worth seeing," said Colonel Brevis.

"We should like to do so immensely, if you can take us," replied Mrs. Savile.

"You must be prepared for a long walk. The sluices are below the first bridge, which you saw this morning, and which merely crosses the overshoot of the river. This 'anicut,' as the natives call it—and we have adopted their term—is one of the largest irrigation works in India," said the Colonel. He took the greatest interest in all his engineering, and was especially fond of irrigation, as it brought wealth to the people of the land.

At six in the evening we left the bungalow for our walk. I was very tired from the heat and the early rising. Much as I wanted to see the sluices I must confess to having started very unwillingly.

Mrs. Savile had managed to sleep during the day, but the mosquitoes had effectually destroyed my slumbers.

We followed the same path that we took in the morning. The sun was just dipping below the horizon, leaving a path of molten gold behind him. The young moon already floated overhead, pale and sickly before the glory of the west. The ground was hot beneath our feet, and the air still and breathless. It was a fore-runner of the hot weather, which in a month would be upon us—an evening to sit still under the trees rather than to take a stiff walk. Arrived at the river bank we stepped down into the dry sandy bed. The sand was warm and closed over our feet at each step, almost to our ankles. We walked—or rather, I should say paddled—heavily through it, by the great arches and piers that looked enormous, now we were below them. A broad, shallow stream of water trickled under the last completed arch, and we crossed the water by a rough, temporary bridge of planks.

Underneath this last arch, and standing about the centre of the river bed, was a small temple, built of granite upon the firm foundation of a rock that upreared itself in the very middle of the river's course.

"What is this? A temple?" I exclaimed.

"What an extraordinary place to choose for it," said Mrs. Savile at the same moment.

"Yes. It was put there long before an English engineer laid his finger on the works. This bridge is built on magnificent foundations, which were laid long ago by some wise old rajah, who knew the value of the waters to himself and his people," said Colonel Brevis.

"And do you mean to say that the foundations, made so long ago, still stand?" exclaimed Mrs. Savile.

"They not only stand, but are as good, if not better, than anything we could make ourselves. You see how we value them by adopting them. We are obliged to give the bridge a serpentine course, you observe. Mr. James, here, will tell you that building arches on the curve is no easy matter."

"Is this the temple that is the subject of the dispute?"

"No; there is no dispute about this. Twice a year, just before each monsoon, the natives come and do 'poojah' here. They are firmly convinced that the number of goats and fowls sacrificed to the presiding deity of the river, will influence the abundance of the water. Government never interferes with the religion of the people, as you know; so we are directed to leave the temple where it is and build our arch over it."

"But, surely, the water will wash a building like that away?"

"No; at full flood it rises to the base of the temple, but it does not reach high enough to displace it. The temple is very old, and in olden days I daresay this has been the scene of many a human sacrifice."

"How horrible!" said Mrs. Savile. "Come along; let us go on with our walk," she continued leading the way.

But I lingered behind. Somehow the scene fascinated me. The stream murmured pleasantly as it flowed past the piers, and the moon, which gathered light every moment in the rapidly advancing darkness of the tropics, silvered the rippling water below.

"Let me stay here till you return. I am tired and disinclined to walk," I pleaded.

"Leave you here alone? Why, we shall be gone an hour or more!" cried Mrs. Savile, stopping and turning back.

"Never mind. I shall enjoy it."

"You need not be alone," said Colonel Brevis. "I can call a peon (or messenger). I told a man to wait for us on the opposite bank in case we wanted any one to carry coats or wraps." He drew out a silver whistle and blew a shrill blast. A voice in the distance answered "Sah'b!" and presently an old man came out of the gathering darkness and stood before us.

"Ramalingum, stay here with this lady, and take care of her till we return."

The old man bowed low and touched his forehead with his fingers.

The party then hurried off and plodded their way through the soft sand till they were lost in the silvery-grey moonlight.

I turned to the quaint temple. It stood under the shade of the archway, just jutting out far enough to rear its strange figured roof above the bridge. It looked down the river branch as though jealously mindful of every drop of waste water that went over the shoot. The stream that owed its source at the present time to hidden springs in the river bed, washed the great rock on which the temple stood, and turned sharply to the left, leaving a broad spit of sand immediately in front. The riverbed was fringed with cocoanuts, and though small in comparison with the Cauvery itself, it was many times broader than our English Thames.

I sat down on the steps of the temple. They were cut in the living rock, and were worn smooth by the action of the water, and by the thousands of worshippers' feet. Old Ramalingum squatted in the fashion of his country below me, close to the water's edge. He did not look at me, but buried his face between his knees and appeared to sleep. Doubtless the old man had had his evening meal of curry and rice, and the sweet, nutty poppy-seeds that flavoured his dish were beginning to take effect and bring him blissful dreams.

I wished I had brought pencil and paper, for I could have sketched in black and white. However, I was not sorry to sit idle and rest. I had no fear of robbers or wild beasts. A native watchman was, I knew, sitting at the other end of the bridge, and the peon was here at my feet. The water lapping the piers

sounded cool and refreshing, and broke the silence of the night. Far away in the distance the jackals occasionally raised their melancholy howl, or a grey monkey, disturbed from its slumbers in the tamarind tope, gave a shrill scream.

I had sat thus for fifteen or twenty minutes when I heard a slight noise behind me. I turned and saw an old man with clean-shaven head. His wrinkled forehead was marked with the trident that claimed him for one of Vishnu's own. A loin-cloth, wrapped closely round his body, was his sole garment. His chest was smeared with sacred ashes and bore a second trident in bright pigment.

He was the caste man in charge of the temple, no doubt a person held in great veneration by its votaries. The door of the building was open, and there was a lamp burning dimly before the rude idol inside. The image shone in the yellow light with the anointing oil, and was adorned with a wreath of faded oleander flowers. A smell of burning incense and oil came out and mingled with the night air.

Ramalingum raised his head and spoke to the old man in Tamil.

"What does the old man say?" I asked, after the two had conversed for some minutes.

"He says, very glad missus come to sit here," replied the peon in his Madrassee English.

I was surprised, as I quite expected to hear that my presence was considered a pollution.

"Why is he glad? Do I bring good luck?" I asked.

The curious old pair approached me, and Ramalingum pointed to my hand, on the back of which was a large brown mole—a disfigurement I had often considered it in my youth.

"That mark, good mark. This day, good day," and Ramalingum pointed to the waxing moon. The temple-man was still closely regarding me. He seemed fascinated by my appearance. Again he spoke in his own language to the peon, and from the little I knew of Tamil he was asking him questions which he would not answer.

"Tell me what he says, Ramalingum; I shall not be angry," I said encouragingly, for the old man interested me in my idleness. They made such a harmonious foreground to the tropical moonlit landscape upon which I was feasting my eyes.

"He asks what year missus born, and what month."

I told him, and the old man's eyes absolutely glittered with delight. He clasped his hands together with an ecstatic gesture and exclaimed, "Swami! swami!"

"Plenty good water coming; plenty rice; missus bring good luck to river."

I smiled at their queer fancies.

"Yes; I hope the water will come when the bridge and the sluices are ready. How long have you known the river?" I asked the old guardian of the temple, the peon translating.

"Seventy years," was the answer.

"How many big floods have you seen?"

"Ah! too many to count."

"And famine times when no water came?"

"Six," whispered the old man, looking uneasily at the staring stone image, that he had tended for threescore years and ten. It was considered unlucky to mention evil times or sicknesses so near the temple.

"One year, very bad year. Swami very angry. People killing no goats, no fowls; forgetting Swami thirsty, wanting blood. Swami shut up the clouds and lock up the water. Not one drop coming. No rice, no cocoanuts, no plantains. People very sick and die; cattle die, all die," and the man shook his head mysteriously.

"But the water came next year?"

"Yes; Swami drink the blood of one Brahmin girl. Then Swami pleased and send big flood."

This savoured of human sacrifice, and a shudder passed over me. A light mist was floating over the water, and the moon was dimmed by a formless vapour. The light had died out of the west, and a fitful breeze blew up the river into my face.

"It is getting cold. I will go back to the bungalow," I said to the peon.

The other started forward and spoke volubly.

"Missus please sit again. A little longer stopping, plenty water coming by-and-by."

I was evidently the subject of more superstition, and knowing what children they were in their fancies, I hope I may be excused when I confess that I lent myself to their superstitions and consented to stay. I was about to drop back into my seat on the step when the old man produced a thick striped cotton rug, and spreading it close to the temple, he invited me to come under the shelter of its walls. I accepted the invitation, and found the rug a great improvement on my other seat. The water had lost its silvery ripples and was like a dull sheet of grey. The old man covered my feet with some soft woollen cloth smelling of sandalwood. I noted that he was eager to make me comfortable, so as to ensure my presence some time longer.

Ramalingum, now thoroughly roused from his slumberous state, watched him with interest as he disappeared into the musty recesses of the temple.

I leaned forward and looked in at the small doorway. The old man was busy lighting more lamps before the idol, and placing others in niches in the dusty walls. He salaamed to the idol several times; and taking a potsherd of live charcoal, he blew up a red spark and sprinkled some powder upon the embers. A beautiful blue smoke curled upwards, and a powerful smell of burning incense filled the air. It was so pleasant that when he

had finished I beckoned to him to bring it to me. He brought a fresh supply of the powder, and waved his smoking potsherd round me, as he had waved it round the idol. My clothes and nostrils were saturated with the fine blue smoke, and I found it a soothing, comforting odour, that counteracted the somewhat marshy smell that was beginning to rise from the water.

When he had thoroughly fumigated me, he put his potsherd down and re-entered the building, returning in a few moments with some silver jewellery and some sparkling gems set rudely in gold. I held out my hands for the treasures, but he would not let me touch them. A necklace of green stones, some small head ornaments, some bangles and finger rings were slowly displayed before my presumably admiring eyes. Perhaps the old man, knowing the sex's weakness for gems, thought that a sight of the temple jewellery, with which the idol was adorned on great occasions, would calm my restlessness and keep me where I was. Slowly he replaced each jewel in its bit of cotton cloth.

Then he opened another little parcel, and took out a curious figure of an imaginary animal. It was a cross between a dog and a lion in the head, and it had a bull's body. The eyes, which were enormous in proportion to its size, stood out of its head like frogs' eyes, and were formed of different coloured stones; one was a dull, dark, rayless sapphire of no value at all; the other was a fiery ruby that scintillated marvellously, considering that I had nothing but the moonlight and the illumination from the open door by which to examine it.

The old man laid the figure in the palm of my open hand and squatted in front of me. He held my fingers after the fashion of a fortune-teller, examining the hand, but his eyes were bent upon mine.

"Missus look at the red eye and see how it sparkles. The Swami is pleased. Now missus look well and closely, and the red eye will turn toward the Swami inside the temple."

Some trickery, I thought. These people are adepts at conjuring, and perhaps by some wonderful machinery the little figure moves. Full of curiosity I gazed at it closely, whilst the old man and Ramalingum, who had edged round to the front alongside of the other, watched me intently, awaiting my expression of wonderment.

As I looked into the sparkling ruby eye, the old man still holding my fingers with gentle touch, my thoughts wandered away into the past. What ancient sculptor had devised the strange uncouth animal represented here? and what did the red and blue eyes mean? Possibly this little senseless figure had often been the recipient of earnest prayer and supplication. Ah! the ruby was getting dull. Surely the sky was darkening, and I looked up quickly. The moon had disappeared and the vapour had grown into thick cloud. I shivered, for there was a strange, uncanny

feeling in the air. Ramalingum took the woollen covering from my feet, and unfolding it, threw it over my shoulders.

I glanced down at the image in my hand. It had not changed; and, tired of the position, I withdrew my fingers from the old man's grasp, and laid the little idol down on the threshold of the temple. I noted at the time that I placed it immediately upon a figure of the trident, engraved on the stone. Ramalingum and his companion smiled faintly, scarcely perceptibly, as I did so.

Then the old man got up, and blowing the embers in the potsherd into a bright glow, he sprinkled more powder upon the fire and wafted blue clouds of smoke all round me.

As the smoke cleared away my eyes caught sight of figures moving on the spit of sand opposite the temple. The clouds were passing away, and the moon shone out with a brilliancy more of the second than of the first quarter.

"Who are those people over there?" I asked Ramalingum. Again the peon and the old man appeared to exchange glances.

"They are native people come to worship the river god," was the answer.

My lethargy and indolence were gone. I also felt no further desire to go, nor did I fear that the gathering crowd would dislike my presence there. My mind was filled with an absorbing interest in their proceedings to the exclusion of all other thoughts; and, resting my face on my hands, I watched the white sandy promontory with eagerness. Every moment fresh arrivals augmented the crowd, till there must have been some hundreds. Some of them bore flaming torches of cotton, dipped in oil; others placed cressets along the water's edge, and the smoking tongues of flame that rose from the burning oil were reflected on the rippling stream, the mellow light mingling strangely with the silvery moonbeams. The crowd was under the influence of some strong excitement, and a buzz of voices reached my ear. Surely Colonel Brevis and Mr. Savile were not aware that a feast was going to take place that evening, or they would not have left me there. However, I was ever ready to study the native under religious excitement, and look on at his strange heathenish festivals. There was only one fear in mingling with an Indian crowd, and that was infection. People got up off their sick beds with convalescent small-pox, quite innocent of disinfectants, and spread the disease with criminal carelessness. Situated as I was on the rock, I was not likely to rub shoulders with them, and I knew that they would not be allowed too near the awe-inspiring idol. The only wonder was that I was permitted to remain there.

All at once the crowd on the sand parted, and a clear pathway was formed in their midst. Advancing down the open way came a group of people, bearing a handsome shamiah by four poles.

A fair high-caste girl—I could see that she was of good caste by the way in which she wore the gold-embroidered silk cloth that

formed her dress—walked beneath the fringed shamiah. She was loaded with jewels, that glittered in the moon and torch light as she moved; and heavy golden bangles on arms and ankles jingled as each foot touched the ground. On her forehead was set the mark of Vishnu.

As she passed, the crowd bent low before her, some throwing themselves on their knees and touching their heads to the ground; others clasping their hands together and exclaiming, "Swami! Swami!"

My old friend, who had stood by the open door of his temple all this time, stepped forward and went down to the water's edge. He had lost all the infirmity of his age in the anticipation of his duties, and his limbs seemed supple and rounded with youth once more. I was surprised at the change, and looked hastily at the peon; to see if the same change had been wrought in him. No; there he was in his favourite squatting position, intently regarding the scene on the sandy shore.

The girl advanced to the stream and then stopped. Four men with clean-shaven heads, disfigured by swami marks, came forward, and taking the girl in their arms, they carried her across the water and set her down before the guardian of the temple.

He touched her forehead with his fingers, and, leading her by the hand, brought her before the open door, to within two or three yards of where I sat. The lights from the many lamps within shone full upon her face, and showed me one of the most beautiful maidens of India I had ever seen. Her complexion was pale olive; her lips were full and of the rich red of the pomegranate. But lovely as her features were, her eyes surpassed all the rest. They were of a beautiful velvety brown, like the rich brown spots on the panther's skin, and, under the influence of strong religious emotion, they mantled to a deep black every now and then and glittered like one of her own jewels. Her limbs were perfectly rounded, and her figure, which was fully grown and developed, was made of the graceful curves and lines that unrestricted nature gives to her own children. This must be some newly-betrothed maiden, who has come to present her thank-offering and to propitiate the deity on behalf of her espousals. Her people's land lies on the river bank, and if the season is good, money and jewels will be forthcoming to forward the wedding. My heart warmed towards the girl, and I smiled at her in sympathetic encouragement. But she did not see me, nor did others, who had waded across the stream after her, appear to notice my presence.

Her rapt gaze was fastened on the idol, which she could see through the open door, and she slowly fell on her knees before the image. The old man went into the building, and, lifting the hideous oil-besmeared figure off its pedestal, brought it out and set it directly in front of her. It was about three feet high.

Then the jewels that I had seen were also brought, and the idol was adorned with them.

What a strange ritual it seemed.

The buzz of voices from the crowd on the sand died away in breathless attention, and once more I could hear the lapping of the water against the piers of the big arches.

Having adjusted the idol to his satisfaction, the temple-man directed the girl to place her hands upon its head. I now noticed for the first time that one of her hands was marked by a mole, precisely similar to mine, except that hers was of a jet black, whilst mine was brown. As she touched the stone she looked up in the man's face and asked him a question. Something was causing her uneasiness, and her beautiful eyes began to wear an anxious look.

"What does she say?" I asked Ramalingum.

"She knows that the Swami is to drink blood, and she is asking where the blood is to come from."

"Where is it?" I repeated, looking round for the usual black goat or gaudy game-fowl, that usually loses its head on these occasions.

"It is there," replied Ramalingum significantly.

I did not see it, but supposed that it was being brought. A narrow gleam of reflected light attracted my attention, and I saw a powerful man come forward out of the little group, with a drawn sword in his hand. He held it down as though he did not wish to attract attention, and his eyes were fixed on the old man.

At this moment the girl caught sight of a middle-aged man and woman who were standing a short distance from her. With a sudden hysterical cry she took her hands from the idol and extended them towards the couple. They were her parents, and her growing fears culminated when she looked into their earnest, anxious faces. The scream was evidently not part of the programme, and it disconcerted the master of the ceremonies. After a moment's hesitation he went in the temple, and reappeared with a silver bowl, in which was some liquid. Stirring the mess with his forefinger he gave it to the girl and bade her drink. She looked doubtfully towards her parents, but they signed to her to obey, and she obediently swallowed it. The old man then took her hands and replaced them on the idol's head, holding them there for the space of a full minute. The girl fixed her eyes upon his face, and the beautiful orbs grew dreamy and calm under his gaze, till all fear of resistance to his will faded, leaving her in a trancelike condition, and as wax in his hands.

Satisfied that she would not disturb the harmony of the proceedings again, he took the silver bowl from which she had drunk the soothing potion, and dipped it in the stream.

He signed to the man with the sword to advance.

Good heavens! They were going to sacrifice the girl herself!

The horrible thought flashed like lightning through my brain. Here, in a country under a Christian government, a beautiful woman was about to be barbarously murdered in cold blood for the sake of the people's hideous superstitions! The Collector, the representative of Her Imperial Majesty the Empress of India, was within reach too, almost within earshot. The thought grew to conviction, and I was about to spring from my seat under the temple wall, when I felt my arm gripped by fingers of iron, and I was forcibly held motionless.

Unable to withdraw my horror-stricken eyes from the group in front of me, I watched the old man dip his fingers in the water and dash a few drops in the girl's upturned face.

At the same moment the other man raised the naked curved blade.

The girl made no sign at the sprinkling of the water. She did not appear to feel it at all.

Again the man dipped his hand and splashed her face. Still no result, and a murmur of disappointment ran through the crowd.

The third time he scooped the water in his palm, and, calling loudly on the name of "Swami!" he flung the water with considerable force upon the lovely wide-open brown eyes.

Like one roused from a trance, she shook her head, as though to free herself from the drops that trickled down her fair cheeks.

At the moment when she made the movement the sword was swung once, twice, thrice, above her head, gathering force with each swing. In its third circle through the air it severed the slender neck in two.

The head rolled forward, whilst her body fell against the hideous image, that seemed to grin in stony delight at the horrible orgie. The life-blood gushed out over it, dyeing the idol crimson; and, in my fevered imagination, the devilish thing of stone appeared to drink the red human wine.

A long exulting cry arose from the people, and it increased to a fiendish howl of madness, as the temple-man lifted the beautiful head and held it aloft for the crowd to see.

Then he cast it into the water as a tribute to the flood.

With a tremendous effort I freed myself from the grasp of the unseen being and sprang to my feet, shrieking. Somebody stepped in front of me; it was old Ramalingum, the peon.

"Did missus call?" he asked in a mild and gentle voice of wonder.

"Yes! help! help! Where is that wicked old temple-man and the man with the sword? Catch them both, and hold them till the Collector comes," I cried in the greatest agitation.

"What man? what sword?" said Ramalingum.

I looked around. Not a soul but our two selves were in sight. The crowd was gone. The murdered girl was gone. The idol was gone; and the temple door was shut. The torches and cressets

were extinguished, and the moon was once more darkened by the vapour I had observed earlier in the evening.

"No one is here. No one has been here since missus came," said the peon soothingly; "missus been sleeping, I think."

"I have not been asleep. I saw it all. Horrible! horrible!" I said shuddering.

A whistle sounded in the distance. It was Colonel Brevis announcing his return with the others.

"There! master coming. Now missus can ask about the people. I think missus dreaming only."

I was too angry to reply, and waited in silence for their approach. I was certain that I had not slept, nor could I have dreamt such a dream as that, with all its vividness and detail. The few minutes that elapsed before they came up gave me time to calm myself and quiet down my nerves.

What had I seen? If it was true, the dreadful signs would still be there. The crowd might vanish, and the idol be returned to its pedestal, but it would be impossible to remove the blood. I stepped down to the spot. The stone was perfectly dry. Not a vestige of water—still less, blood—was to be seen.

When Mrs. Savile came up she said, "I am so sorry we have been such a time. After seeing the sluices we came back to the river bank and sat under a tree, over there." She pointed to a large banyan in full view of the temple.

"Did you see any natives moving about," I asked.

"Not a soul. They are wise people; they go to roost with the sun and get up with the sun."

"You did not see natives walking on the sand, over there?" I said, indicating the spit of land.

"Certainly not. Had there been any we must have seen them, for this stream goes back to the river bank, and forms a promontory. They must have passed close to us to get here, or else they must have waded across the water. Have you been disturbed at all since we left?" asked Mrs. Savile, looking curiously into my face.

"I thought I saw people over there, at the water's edge," I replied, unwilling to say what I had seen.

"They were jackals, probably," said Colonel Brevis. "They come down to drink, and I remember hearing some howling in this direction whilst we were sitting under the tree."

"I believe you have been asleep," said Mr. Savile. "The long day and the heat have overcome you."

"Where is the old keeper of the temple," I asked the peon.

He looked at me with stupid ignorance, as though he did not understand. Colonel Brevis replied to my query:

"The old man who has charge of the temple always sleeps in a little alcove behind. Come this way and I will show you."

He led me round to the other side, and showed me the old villain, rolled in his blanket, apparently fast asleep.

"He goes to bed at dusk, and rises with the dawn. Nothing would wake him now, for I believe he eats opium. We might beat him and kick him to a jelly, and he would sleep through it all," said the Colonel.

"He cannot be asleep. He was with me only a few minutes ago," I said incredulously.

Colonel Brevis called the peon.

"Ramalingum, has this old fellow been with you and the lady?"

"No, sah'b," was the ready reply.

Colonel Brevis smiled. I was so angry at the deliberate lie, and at Colonel Brevis's evident belief in the peon's word before mine, that I turned aside without another syllable. Once more searching the landscape on all sides in vain for some of the crowd I had so recently seen, I followed the party home to the bungalow.

It was past eleven when we got in, and as we intended starting early on our homeward journey, we went to bed at once.

All night I was haunted by what I had seen. The scenes re-acted themselves in my brain over and over again. Thus between waking and sleeping I passed a most wretched night. Gradually my nerves quieted down, and I could think quietly over it. There was only one conclusion that seemed to me at all satisfactory. The old temple-man, wishing, for reasons of his own, to keep me there, had managed by some art, known only to himself, to lift the curtain of the past. Perhaps he burnt some other drug besides the incense, and so clouded my bodily sight, whilst it sharpened my mental vision, and made me receptive of bygone scenes which were mirrored on his own brain. Perhaps I pursued the workings of his uncivilized, heathen mind, and followed, with my eye, the pictured wishes of his evil superstitious heart. Of one thing I was certain, that had he no fear of the Sircar, and were he able to carry out the desire of his secret soul, he would organize just such an orgie as I had witnessed; and his choice of victim would, as likely as not, fall upon me, with the mole-marked hand, to assuage the terrible thirst of his fetish, the river god.

STAR-CROWN'D THE SWEET NIGHT.

FLOWERS are dying,
The brown leaves flying,
Autumn is near.
Cold blows the chill air,
Frost o'er the earth fair,
Winter is drear.
Warmer the sun glows,
Melting the white snows,
At Spring's behest.
Placid the moon's light,
Star-crown'd the sweet night,
Summer is best.

JOSEPHINE ERROL.

BOOKED THROUGH.

A RUNAWAY TALE.

I WAS barely in time, and had had a close run for it, so much so that when I jumped into a first-class carriage at Midwest station I scarcely steadied myself with an effort, so quick was my impulse and the agitation evoked by exertion. I would not imply thereby that my normal temperament was languid, for as a captain in the Royal Terra-cotta Fusiliers this would be a reflection on my corps and company; but there is something undignified in a rush for a train, and it entailed the usual consequences.

The compartment had looked to me empty as I sprang in, but almost simultaneous with my movement, there was another and unexpected one. A young lady, seated in the far corner, had sprung up from a half-recumbent position, turned her head abruptly away from me, and leant resolutely and fixedly towards the window. I was glad of a moment's respite to compose myself, for my complexion ran rather too much in harmony with my parade garb; but when I considered that my wonted air of fascination was regained, I naturally anticipated a more sociable line of life.

In this, however, I was not to be gratified. Had the lady been frightened by my abrupt entrance, shrunk from my aspect, and taken refuge in a view of nature? I might put the questions, but there was little chance of a response from the one who could solve them. My fair companion bestowed no look or thought upon me, but kept her face studiously averted. Fair, I presumed her to be, since her figure was slight, exquisitely neat, and faultlessly attired. A dress of cream-coloured serge was not marred by any meaningless bows or surplus laces. It was plainly "tailor-cut," and had the *distingué* air attached to such garments. A hat of brown plush, the very tint of the glossy hair that peeped out in a coil from beneath, completed her costume, and, I may add, finished up the work of captivation in my heart. Was it necessary to see a face to conceive its beauty? Certainly not in my case, my imagination being vivid and my temperament sanguine. Still a glance round would have been reassuring; but the train sped on, time with it, and nothing else advanced in harmonious acceleration. The figure at the window was statue-like; I did not dare to speak or stir, and if my heart quickened its pulsations, this was the only little outlet it permitted itself.

Presently a station was reached, and now I thought curiosity and longing must at last culminate in a crisis. The lady will either alight or change her position of observation to the platform side. If she is averse to a fellow-traveller, the first course is easy, for the guard is calling aloud the name of the stopping-place, and pausing at our very door. But there was a bang to it and others almost in the same breath, the shrill whistle followed, and we were off again. My companion leant more fully forward at the moment, and a tiny foot, resting on tip-toe, was revealed by the posture. The window was open, and I could see a bewildering agitation to the soft wavelets of hair that fringed the coil, but something struck me as I gazed. It was a peculiarity touching the envelopments of the throat. A lappet of cream-coloured tulle was wound round it, very high up, but there must have been black ribbon or lace beneath, for I failed to descry the fair tint of the skin, or to catch a glimpse of the tiniest bit of neck. It was puzzling and provoking to have to speculate so much when one movement would have resolved all, and at last, half eager, half irate, I broke out hurriedly:

"Pardon, madam, but perhaps you feel the draught too much? Shall I close this window?"

It was reassuring to find I had a human being to deal with. There was an answer breathed with the sweetness of a siren's voice.

"Thanks, no. I like the air."

That must be so with a vengeance, I thought; for if the season was summer, the weather was winter; a smart breeze was blowing, and the dust flew correspondingly.

Looking closer, I perceived, however, that the lady was thickly veiled, and the gauzy environment no doubt formed a protecting medium. Suddenly we drew near a tunnel—the engine proclaimed it, the duller light, the damper atmosphere. Here was an opportunity. I sprang forward.

"Allow me," I said, and laid my hand on the leathern pull of the sash. But I was repelled; resolutely, mutely, with an invisible force, I felt myself put aside. A delicately gloved hand drew up the window, but the lady's face remained pressed towards it. Even the blackened panes had a fixed attraction, mysteriously strong, irresistibly compelling.

It was impossible at the same time to forget that the attitude had been only assumed upon my entrance into the carriage. Previously the very reverse of this eagerness for air had been displayed, and the lady had been reclining in the cushioned depths of her seat. The reflection was not a flattering one. My heated visage must have impressed her unfavourably, and she could not nerve herself for a second look.

As I bit my lips and twirled my moustache in vexatious reverie, the whistle broke forth anew; a gleam of light—another

—brought back visions of life and day, and the next instant we were under the sky vault once more.

Just at this crisis the same gloved hand let down the window abruptly, the breeze freshened as we swept round a curve, and in a quick gust something startling happened.

The lady's veil rose aloft like a wing, fluttered for a second, and then the whole head-gear was gone—not her hair; that remained. The rippling brown locks were true and trusty, but the plush hat had disappeared, and with it the calm steadfastness of its owner. A little scream was heard, hands were raised despairingly, and fell then in a close concealing clasp across the face.

"Oh! what shall I do? Can I get it? Could you catch it?" was the appealing cry that followed.

A wild request, but anything from her lips was a command, and I was at the window with a bound.

Leaning out I saw, like a wreath of smoke, something ascending, then hovering in mid air, changing current and direction with the caprices of the wind. It was the grey gossamer, which had clung close to its post for long, but had taken French leave at last and parted company with hat and wearer.

"I am afraid recovery is impossible," I said gravely; "your hat has not caught anywhere; it has been carried quite away. I can only see the veil in the distance."

The lady was either laughing or crying, possibly both, a trifle hysterical, but I was too delighted to object even to this phase of matters. It is not generally a pleasant state to encounter single-handed, but it promised at least acquaintance with the lovely object of the attack, and that was much to an investigator like myself.

If she would only take down her hands! The creamy "kids" became more aggravating each moment, and I was all but tempted to snatch them from their position.

Fortunately I restrained myself, and still more propitiously the lady recovered herself. The spasmodic action ceased, she attempted to draw some floating tendrils of hair over cheeks and temples as a substitute for the truant veil; and then, with a deep-drawn sigh, her hands unclasped themselves, and fell in her lap.

It was my turn to collapse now, and an exclamation was barely checked on my lips.

Horror, consternation, the pangs of disappointment, all rose to the surface of my feelings, and gained the sway of prominence. My companion's eyes were fixed upon me; they were large, brown, and brilliant, as I had pictured. Her lips seemed to smile, there was an expression of earnestness and sweetness on her countenance, a look of that winning girlishness which an instinct had assured me of, but—but—I can scarcely express it—I can barely write it, her skin was black, jet-black as an African's!

With this revelation everything underwent a mysterious trans-

formation for me. The wavy hair thereupon became dark, crisp, and wiry; the pouting lips grew fuller, the roundness of contour changed to flatness. I instinctively recoiled.

"Oh, what shall I do?—what shall I do?" murmured the lady; but whether the pathetic cry had reference to her *chapeau* or her colour, I was confusedly ignorant of.

"It cannot be helped," I said lugubriously; "nothing can alter it now—a fixed law is—"

"Fiddlestick!" interposed my companion. "If my hat had been well fixed, it was enough. You propose nothing—you do nothing; how can I get out of the train in this way?"

"How did you get into it?" I began. But suddenly conscious that I was mixing up my thoughts with reflections foreign to hers, I pursued hurriedly, "An accident may happen—no one is to blame—I will explain—"

"You may leave that to me," was the brusque response. "You are not so clear as it is. I prefer giving my own statement."

"As you please, madam; I thought you were claiming my help in some way."

"Certainly not in that; you are muddled as a dream. But considering that you are the cause of the misadventure—"

"I—the cause!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, sir," she affirmed. "Your rough entrance, your rude stare compelled me to a retreat. There was nothing to fall back upon but the window."

"I did not mean—"

"Your meanings may be as vague as you please. I go by actions."

"I have a hat!" I exclaimed suddenly—"a travelling-cap, rather. Would you—could you accept it?"

"Where is it?" she said briefly.

"Here in my pocket," and I began to fumble, but succeeded only in pulling out a yellow handkerchief and two ends of cigars. The orange silk of the former caught my eye. "Perhaps a turban—?" I ventured. A glare of the orbs, grown black now, answered the proposition as it deserved. I was getting knee-deep in blunders. Luckily, at the moment, a further search brought up the smoking-cap from the lower regions of my pocket, and I extended it apologetically.

"It is quite a harmless shade," I remarked, "quiet and undemonstrative—any lady might wear it."

"Harmless?" said my companion scornfully. "I am not afraid of a colour."

The words were a cut at me. With unreasoning prejudice I was shrinking, at all events, from a coloured person, and, I fear, had not sufficiently veiled my feelings.

"Try if the cap fits," I began. I was too nervous to be otherwise than serious, but the lady gave me another crushing look as

she all but snatched at the head-gear. It certainly was an inoffensive affair; nevertheless, she eyed it witheringly. Brown velvet, embroidered in gold braid a little the worse for the wear, and toned down correspondingly. She scanned the lining above all, and I felt myself aggrieved by the scrutiny.

"I am guiltless of 'Macassar,' I said, "and smoke is a disinfectant in itself. I think you may safely embark in this."

"I shall return it, of course," was the dry answer as she just placed the cap gingerly on the crisp surface of her hair. "Pray favour me with your address."

Proud of my territorial derivation, I drew out my card and placed it before her—"Captain VALANCE WARRE, Royal Terracotta Fusiliers."

The lady started. Yes, I had impressed her at last. Whatever I had been in her eyes, I was elevated now. She did not speak for a moment. Then, with a murmured "Thanks," she took a little scented case from her waist-band, put in the card, and closed the receptacle leisurely.

"Are you going far?" I hazarded after a pause.

"Are you?" was the return.

"To the station for Tallhouse Barracks. I am attached to the dépôt there, and have been on leave, but must get back this evening."

"I am for the same station," said the lady with a piercing glance.

I felt a sort of shock as she announced it. Why, I could not define. Surely she had a right to alight where she pleased; the train was not dispatched solely to convey me to a particular destination. Nevertheless, a queer sensation, such as a haunted man might know, was stealing over me. My fate and future seemed to be getting a little mixed with those of my strange companion.

"We change at the junction—the next stopping-place," I added hurriedly. "Are you booked through?"

She nodded assent.

"Then you have only to cross the platform," I explained.

"Is *that* all? I suppose I must manage it."

"There is nothing remarkable in the *cap*," I interposed. I did not mean the word to be accentuated, but no doubt my evil genius contrived it, for there was a flash of the eyes again.

The train was slackening speed at this juncture, and I leant from the window at my side.

"We are just in. Have you any packages?" I inquired, drawing back my head and glancing around politely. But the demand was a superfluous one, running in a counter vein to her possessions. From her slight wardrobe something was missing, indeed, but an addition in the way of parcel or wrapping was, at least, not visible.

"Luggage in the van?" I ventured.

"No, no! don't fuss. Look out for a quiet compartment in the other train, that is all;" and I felt myself dismissed with the subject.

At the same time some conjuring manipulation was going on in the far corner—that much I could divine. From beneath the upper drapery of the *beige* skirt an object of interest was drawn forth. It was serpentine, many-hued, glistening. It seemed to grow like an enchanter's wand and to develop surprising qualities. Fine as a Dacca web, yards of which can be passed through a lady's ring, it unwound itself into a long scarf striped in various colours and plainly of Indian manufacture. My companion threw this dexterously around her shoulders, knotted it becomingly under the left arm, and then folded her hands with the grace of satisfaction. Certainly her figure was not disappointing. There was an ease, a lightness about it that had an independent attractiveness. I had to struggle from illusions again.

My fellow-traveller was now so completely an Eastern princess that there could be no attempt at disguise, and, feeling that I must escort her with all courtesy in the coming transit, I armed myself to bear a battery of eyes.

Suddenly the lady sprang up; her elegant repose was gone.

"My purse!" she exclaimed. "Where is it? What have I done with it?"

My suspicions rose at the words.

"But you have your ticket?—you are booked through?" I began.

"I have nothing if that's gone. But it is! it isn't!" and some helpless groping at a provokingly backward pocket kept us both in suspense.

Another surprise was in store for me, and it was with an actual start I met this new revelation.

Indiana pulled off her glove; the intricacies of the skirt-folds demanded it, and following her motions with the growing interest of excitement, I felt my heart give a bound. A lily-white hand was disclosed—in the panic of a purse-hunt, precautions had been forgotten.

I drew a long breath. My instincts had not deceived me. She was clear as a crystal, snowy as a swan! But mysteries deepened, if light opened on her; I was to be kept in the dark in some way.

"Yes, there it is, the tiresome thing!" she ejaculated at the moment, and a tiny gold-clasped purse was extricated in triumph. "I suppose we show tickets here?"

As she spoke she must have remembered her inconsiderate discovery, for very hastily she averted her head and commenced to insinuate her little hand as speedily as possible into the kid encasement. It was I who was to play the part of a "black"

now. I was her abject slave in a trice. Anything, everything I would have done that could follow on her will and wishes. But my devotion was not to be taxed very severely.

When we stood on the exchange platform the lady gazed around her anxiously. The place was crowded.

"Where are the waiting-rooms?" she said. "I shall remain here for the next train."

"But I thought you were booked through?" I broke in.

"Does that matter if I choose to alter my movements? Does it make a prisoner of me?" and there was the slightest elevation of a piquant little nose which had regained all its symmetry in my eyes.

"No, no, certainly not," I stammered. "But the train in readiness is a fast one."

"Then you had better not lose it."

"But I must see you safe. I *cannot* leave you like this."

"Is there an impossibility?—not as far as I am concerned," was the quick reply; and before I could gain another word she turned away, took a gliding step, and was instantly lost sight of. I was in one of those hesitating poses fatal in a crowded thoroughfare, and paid the penalty of my inconsiderateness. A smart collision, an apology, and a release from entanglement, all passed in the same breath, and simultaneous therewith my recognition of a brother-officer.

"Darvell! my dear fellow," I exclaimed. "How is this? Where are you off to?"

"Out of your way first of all—we are not at a blockade, Warre. I'm in a thundering hurry."

But even as he spoke, he paused, and ran his eyes along the changing line of passengers going hither or thither, as arrival or departure moved them.

"Did you see a lady?" he began.

"Yes, yes," I answered, with my thoughts alert on the topic.

"She has just alighted—is waiting for the next train."

"Where—where is she now?"

"I wish I knew myself. She shot off like a meteor."

The metaphor must have been suggestive, for he vanished himself at the words, and I was left standing in partial collapse to hear the whistle of the starting train in which I should have been, but was not. I had an hour to wait, and didn't like it. After my anxious rush at the first departure, I had let matters slide now, and had nothing to compensate me for the stupidity of delay. In vain I searched about for either friend or fair one. The latter must have undergone one of those bewildering metamorphoses which seemed a second nature to her, for no Eastern princess, no Indian pennon was to be seen as token of my late adventure.

As to Major Darvell, I met him next at mess the following evening, and when I asked him mildly if he had been successful

in finding his friend, he gave me a stare, and demanded with brusqueness, "Who was *the friend?*"—he had not spoken of any!

"I did not imply a *cher ami*. But you certainly inquired for a lady."

"And will do so still, if it interests you in the least. I know you were up in the subject yesterday—had it on the brain, in fact."

How could he tell all this? But to question was unregimental after a first repulse. I saw that my curiosity must retire. To have it gratified in the present quarter—or quarters, rather—was an unmanly hope.

I don't want to dub myself a cool hand, but at the same time the overturning of a scalding coffee-pot was not in my line, yet I managed to indulge in the pastime on the following morning at the breakfast-table. A missive by parcel post had been given in, and laid down before me. I knew the shape of the packet, the familiar soft contour, the faint Havannah odour it emitted—a cigar might be ready—my smoking-cap was coming to light!

The threads that confined its wrappings were quickly snapped in the hope of finding a clue within, but nothing disclosed itself but the brown velvet turban, and two words traced in backward penmanship on the paper that surrounded it, "*With thanks.*" Postmark was looked to, but it had effaced itself with the stamps, and it seemed as if about the best thing I could do, would be to let the adventure obliterate itself as effectually. A puzzle without an accompanying solution is scarcely a very lively entertainment in a day of rapidity.

I think it was about a month later that I received a glossy card of invitation to a "breakfast" which intimated nuptial festivities. It was at the house of an aunt of Major Darvell, and it soon leaked out that he was to be the happy man on the occasion. Business called me away until the very morning of the ceremony, so that I learned no more, but went to it, thinking one of his pretty cousins was to figure as the bride. I had had a weakness myself for Laurette, the youngest of the family, and was relieved to find her amongst the blushing train of hand-maidens in the church-porch, and to understand that I was to have the privilege of escorting her to the carriage on the return drive.

With this programme in view, I had my attention quite diverted from the bride, and I first looked at her as she walked in solemn procession down the aisle at the completion of the ceremony.

I had Miss Laurette already assigned to me, and I believe at the moment I gave a most unwarrantable pressure to the little hand within my arm.

Her eyes lifted themselves from the correct droop. "Anything wrong?" they questioned. "Slippery tiles," I murmured. But

my gaze at the sylph-like figure, the large brown eyes of the chief lady of the assembly, had not escaped my partner's notice.

She probed me later, and confidences grew between us. I had a confirmation of a suspicion, and, following upon it, an explanation of my adventure on the railway journey.

The bride—pure now in tint as her garb—was the lady concerned in that escapade, and when I mentioned to Miss Laurette my acquaintance with her under a foreign aspect she broke into smiles.

"So you thought our dear little Dottie should be in black to-day?" she said. "You would throw a dark colouring over a gay event, Captain Warre."

"Circumstances are too strong for us sometimes, Miss Darvell. I am charmed to see a cloud lifted in one way, and should be further gratified to have it removed in a fuller sense. Do scatter for me the lingering shades of mystification."

Laurette laughed.

"Was it not capital?" she said. "Dottie is safe to go through with anything. She is my dearest old school-friend, I should tell you. We were at Madame Delétude's together. Then my poor pet was carried off to India to a terrible old guardian. She lost her own parents when a child. At the end of a year climate did its work on the constitution as well as the temper of the ogre, and he had to come home. Dottie was shut up in a tall griffin of a house in Brompton; but I once managed to extricate her for a ball. There she met my cousin Arthur. Well—I needn't go on. You know him, and you have seen her. There is something to be said for both."

"And more to be thought. Estimates are beyond me in a case like this."

"I wish the old general had been as weak at computation. But he put a very low figure on poor Arthur, while Dottie and her rupees headed the quotation. In her preciousness she was kept literally under lock and key, bound to captivity. There was nothing for it, then, but to slip the knot and to tie another. Her coloured maid helped out the programme and let her mistress escape, wound up in her Dacca scarf, and with an application on her fair face, which fortunately was not a 'fast dye.' I had arranged to meet Dottie at the junction with my cousin and bring her to our house. But the loss of her hat and veil put her out, and she rushed off to the waiting-room to try and get a good wash before she ran the gauntlet of a further inspection. Here I found her while the major was speaking to you, and, not to waste time, we secured a cab and drove direct from the junction. All came serene in the end. Dottie—or Mrs. Darvell, I should say—is of age to-day, and is no longer a minor discord."

I had only one further question to ask.

"Why did she turn away from me so persistently in the railway carriage?"

"Vanity, I presume. She had seen you at that Terra-cotta ball, and danced with you, too. She half feared you might recognize her, and the thought of her black face was too much for her delicate feelings."

"Well, she looks a true Saxon to-day," I said with a glance at the bride, as she figured conspicuously at the banquet where we were now seated. "Still, there are other faces more fascinating."

I had only had two glasses of champagne, but I suppose there is something infectious in the aroma of bliss at a festal board of the kind. Vapours arise bewildering to the senses, the heart is lost, if not the head, and in my case I need merely add that there was no loss, but a very special gain from the results of that day and its captivating companionship. I, too, was "booked" for a new departure in life, and to go through with it was the next thing on the cards.

THE OLD HOUSE ON THE CLIFF;

OR, HUMPHREY THORSDANE'S WIFE.

By W. W. FENN.

CHAPTER I.

THORSDANE CLIVE the place was called, Thorsdane being the family name of the owners, and Clive probably a corruption of "cliff," the lofty chalk cliff on the extremest verge of which the house now stood. It was an ample though common-place looking brown brick building of the unattractive architecture of its period—1753, according to a tablet over the narrow doorway in its northern or landward front. Towards the sea, and from the sea, it had a somewhat more picturesque effect on account of its romantic situation and the circular turret at the eastern flank, with its sugar-loaf roof rising many feet above the rest of the structure. Thus much of it had been familiar to me since I was a boy, but I was past thirty ere I became acquainted with it internally. Then I found that access to this turret was obtained by a spiral stone stair from the end of a corridor leading from the entrance hall. A few yards up this stair brought you to a door opening into an octagonal oak-panelled chamber. Above this were two more rooms, reached by almost perpendicular wooden steps, passing through a trap door in the ceiling, each apartment being a repetition of the one below. You might have expected to find loop-holed windows in such a place, but each floor was lighted by a narrow ordinary leaded casement, looking seawards. The only history attaching to this nondescript pile is that it was added to piecemeal by its successive owners, the earliest of whom were closely associated with what in plain terms may be called the privateering and smuggling interests of their epoch.

My friend, Ralph Thorsdane, its present occupant, was descended direct from these gentry, and although a simple country squire he unquestionably inherited much of the spirit and daring of his ancestors. Fifteen years had passed since we left the so-called college at the watering-place of Brightsea, only seven miles by the coast road from Thorsdane Clive. We had not met in the interval, and it was in consequence of a pressing invitation to visit him at

his lately inherited property that I now found myself Ralph Thorsdane's guest. He came across me accidentally whilst I was strolling on the parade at Brightsea, and seems to have immediately recognized me, for he pulled up the dog-cart he was driving and hailed me by name. For several minutes I quite failed to trace, in the rough, sunburnt, bearded countenance, the features of the thin, pale stripling with whom I had been a great chum at school.

"It's a jolly ramshackle old place," he said, referring very soon after our greeting to his present abode; "surely you must remember it! I used to go and see my aunt there, you know, and now it belongs to me; but it is not likely to belong to anybody many years more—the sea is making tremendous inroads and must carry the whole fabric away soon, bag and baggage. Twenty yards of the cliff fell last winter while I was sleeping there. By Jove, sir! I thought it was all up with us—such a thundering row! I have had great difficulty in keeping any servants since, and fellows funk coming to stay, but I really do wish you would come and see me there. I can put you up in a most romantic corner, and you were always fond of romance and poetry and that sort of thing. It would just suit you, but I have grown deuced matter-of-fact. Now, when will you come?—say to-morrow. I will give you a mount and we will have a spin with the South Down Foxhounds on Friday; they meet at Fellscombe close by. Do come and stay—stay a week. We have lots to talk over; why, I heard you were in America. You are not married, eh? No, that's right; neither am I. No, no, we know a trick worth two of that, don't we? Not such fools!"

After this fashion the invitation was given, and although I soon saw he had by no means developed into my style of man, I accepted it. He was very cordial. I was very lonely; family affairs, which have nothing to do with this narrative, had kept me away from England for many years. I was glad to be back and had a sort of sentimental craving to get a touch of old associations. This feeling indeed it was which took me to Brightsea. I had been wandering round the old college and marking all the changes time had wrought in its surroundings, but no change struck me so forcibly as that which I observed in this friend of early days. Yet he was a direct link with the past, and this consideration settled the question; I would go—and I did.

Further acquaintance with Ralph Thorsdane confirmed my original impression, displaying as it did a tone of mind peculiarly objectionable to me. The hideous doctrines of the materialist had sunk deep into his nature. He had become an utter sceptic, whilst I, on the contrary, perhaps from natural tendency, had, through my intercourse with the tone of American thought on spiritual matters, grown a faithful believer in an unseen world. This, grafted on to some poor artistic and poetic power, put me into entire opposition to my host. However, we amicably agreed

to differ, and never have I been more thankful that I did not allow his hot temper to create an angry separation, which it was on the point of doing more than once. In the light of what followed, I should never have forgiven myself if it had.

The month was November. He had driven me over from Brightsea late in the afternoon, and we were now sitting smoking before a blazing fire after a good dinner in the little snuggerly; the fittest hour and conditions for a gossip between old friends. And gossip we did to his heart's content, if not to mine. He rattled on from one subject to another, especially glorying in the least creditable deeds of his ancestors, notably the betrayal of one of them, a certain Humphrey Thorsdane, into the hands of the revenue officers by his faithless wife, which led to a mystery and a superstition. But I did not even like the way he spoke of this; it was coarse, not to say ribald. Still I bore with him, and extracted a full account of the event. It shall be given here in his own words, but with certain modifications.

"All I know of it," he said, "is what I remember my old aunt telling me from time to time, when I came to see her here, as you may recollect I did from the college. After her death I never thought about it, until I found myself living in the house. Her old housekeeper, who is still here, won't revert to it, since I once chaffed her about believing it, and called it 'rot.'

"Humphrey Thorsdane, who was my great-grandfather, was living here somewhere about 1812, and kept up the contraband transactions of the family nobly. He was continually within an ace of getting into trouble. The country people said he only escaped by being in league with the devil."

Ralph paused here, and then added cynically, by way of parenthesis:

"As you believe in the devil, perhaps you will agree with them; never mind! Old Humphrey seems to have been a gentleman of a fiendish temper, from which everybody suffered, particularly his young and beautiful wife. It was a marriage of interest, and she naturally, therefore, never loved him. Details are wanting; your brilliant imagination will supply them by the light of the Divorce Court. The story runs that he imprisoned her in the turret chamber because he caught her making signals to a revenue cutter in the offing. Then it turned out somehow that he found the bold captain of the cutter was an old lover of hers, and that he had been seen on shore more than once throwing a stone with a letter tied round it into an open window at which she was standing. So he makes for the turret, comes upon her reading one of these letters, and then and there, in his fury, shoots her dead, and serve her right, I say! Confound the women! it's always their fault in these matters—they tempt the men first, 'for 'tis their nature to.'

"However, the captain heard the shot, guessed what had hap-

pened, brought up a party of his men, and broke into the house, by virtue of their search-warrant in the matter of contraband kegs, &c. Old Humphrey made a stand for it, used his fire-arms freely, and tried to escape by a cave under the tower. The whole cliff is honeycombed with caves, into which the sea roars now like a fiend. But being baulked, the old chap made for the topmost story. Here he seems to have been on the point of capture, when he eluded his enemies by jumping bang out of the window into the sea, never to be seen again, dead or alive! But, bless my soul, it's all bosh, of course. Why, eighty years ago, this ramshackle old place lay quite inland; a man could not have jumped into the sea from a window in the turret then, though he might easily now, of course. The sea is always encroaching on this coast, and, as I told you, has done so by at least fifty yards in my time! I shall have to clear out, and live up at the farm. But what matters! it will be very little trouble for me to move, and the old sticks of furniture, like the house itself, are becoming worthless—it won't signify twopence if the whole thing goes by the board some fine night, so long as I'm not in it."

Thorsdane laughed uproariously as he finished. He had made very free with the bottle—another of his objectionable habits, as I soon found. Then, observing perhaps that I looked rather serious and interested, he continued, with a mocking gravity, "Ah! but it's no laughing matter, is it? No, I should think not, for this is not all. The tradition goes on that ever since that time Mrs. Humphrey Thorsdane sleeps now and then in her room—the one bed-room in the turret."

"Have you ever seen her?" I asked.

"Lord, no! nor any one else. Why, you don't mean to say that you think it's true? You can't be such an ass as to believe such rot; the Yankees have made you superstitious, and no mistake!"

"Perhaps I am superstitious," I replied. "Superstitious, that is, to the extent of believing that we mortals with our finite senses cannot see everything that goes on around us, I mean in the spiritual world. I believe in the hackneyed Hamletism, that 'there are more things in Heaven and earth,' &c."

"Well, I am sorry for you," he said contemptuously. "I wish I had known this before, because you seem to forget that the turret-room is your room. That is where I had you put up as I promised. Didn't you notice it was round, beautifully panelled and all the rest of it, thoroughly romantic and just fit for a poet? I thought you would like it; but perhaps you won't now."

"On the contrary, you have given it an additional interest. I fancied the look of it directly I entered it this afternoon."

"Then you are not nervous?" said Thorsdane derisively. "Well, that's all right; but you can change your quarters now if you like; it's not too late; change with me."

"No, no, on no account," I interposed. "I shall be glad to investigate the tradition."

"But you are sure you are not humbugging; not *afraid*, eh, old fellow?"

I assured him I was in earnest, as I sincerely was, whatever may be thought of me from this avowal by those who do not share my opinions.

We did not pursue this, nor indeed any other topic much longer that night. It was getting late, and we soon after took our candles from the hall table, the host preceding me to show the way to the foot of the turret stair. He pretended he was afraid to go any further, and with a mocking seriousness as we bade good-night, declared that I had given him quite a scare, that he did not like it, offered me a brace of pistols and so on. In fact the wine had led him by this time into a fatuous stage of its fell influence, and I think I liked him less now than in his earlier and more boisterous mood. I was grievously disappointed in him, so altered was he from the ingenuous lad I remembered. However, these are changes we have all experienced, for, verily, few of the friends of our youth realize what we expect of them when we meet them in after life, and when in the interval "our lines of country," have lain in entirely opposite directions. As boys, Ralph and I had been wild young scaramouches together, thoroughly in accord in most pursuits; we had grown up entirely different men.

CHAPTER II.

ON arriving in the afternoon the turret-chamber had presented nothing more notable than its quaint form and delightful situation, albeit perilously overhanging the cliff edge. Now that I am alone in it, in the dead of night, and acquainted with the tradition of the tragedy enacted in it, a somewhat strange sensation, half numbness, half drowsiness overtakes me. It is the first time knowingly that I am occupying a room said to possess any supernatural associations, yet I have long wished for some such opportunity of testing whether I was really endowed with any mediumistic capacity, as many American friends assured me was the case, because it is one thing to believe in the existence of occult forces, and quite another to be in a position, or to have the power of observing them. It was thoroughly feasible to me that the spirit of that unhappy wife might in a sense be yet hovering within the walls where it had been suddenly and cruelly severed from its corporeal part, but it did not follow that everybody would be capable of beholding it, or be conscious of its presence. Those natures who, at the best, are allowed but a mere glance into the unseen, are few and rare. Many of these are often ignorant of the subtle essence within them, and on these it is that super-

natural experiences produce such infinite terror. But others, who are conscious of their power, in however small a degree, are never oppressed by fear. This was my case, I was not even timid; hence, with the utmost coolness, I made a minute examination of the apartment.

The old oak panelling rose to within a yard of the ceiling, but being octagonal, whilst the turret was circular, a small aperture was left at each angle between the main wall and the woodwork, the projection at the top being covered in, and forming a narrow crescent-shaped shelf. The small modern tent-bedstead stood clear of the wall, and it was easy to see that except by the ladder leading straight to a trap in the roof there were no other means of access. The entrance door, opening as it did from the stair, made it also clear that there was only one way of ascending the tower. There being no fireplace, I drew the heavy curtains aside and opened the casement a little way for ventilation, as the weather was unseasonably warm. Opposite the foot of the bed stood an antique high-backed leather chair, such as is used in porter's lodges. Two smaller chairs, washstands, &c., a little dressing table by the window, and a worm-eaten chest of drawers completed the furniture. A large loose square unfixed carpet covered the floor. Truly a very unusual, and as Thorsdane prophesied contemptuously to me, attractive sleeping berth. Yes, and just the sort of room to be haunted, although I dislike the expression.

After gazing for a while out into the murky blackness of the windless night and listening to the "chime of Neptune's restless motion," surging gently on the shore some hundred feet immediately below, I sat down in the large high-backed chair, only partially undressed. A host of speculations thronged my brain, not distressing or perplexing, for, egotistic as it may sound, the mighty mystery surrounding our life and the mystery of life itself as regarded by the generality of mankind are to me only mysteries to our finite senses. Once released from "this muddy vesture of decay," these will become so unlimited that all must be made clear. But none the less does one speculate on the "how" and the "what" it is. There is no surer encourager of sleep than this kind of trustful, faithful spirit, and being entirely under its comforting influence I soon began to doze in the chair. By degrees the shaded candle grew dim upon my sight and at length I may assume I fell into a perfect state of unconsciousness. Not, however for very long, I fancy, judging by the consumption of the candle, and when I awoke only one predominating fact was in my mind, some one had entered the room.

Involuntarily I looked towards the door, but it was closed as I had left it with the key turned in the lock. Whence then came the sharp cold wind creeping round the sides and over the top of the high-backed leather chair? Not from the door, not from the window; they were both full in sight, the former on my right, the

latter straight in front of me. At first, lazily wondering what it meant, I stood up and looked over my shoulder to be utterly amazed, for there, not a yard off, directly behind my chair, was an opening in one of the angles of the panelling from its shelf-like top right down to the floor, large enough to admit a man, and it was from this that the cold wind came.

Without a moment's hesitation I stepped up to it, and found that the whole angle of the woodwork simply formed a sliding door, which readily came back to its place and closed the opening; but when closed the moulding of the panelling at its edge forbade detection, so accurately did it fit. This, of course, was why I had overlooked it, for there was no lock or spring indicating its existence.

In my eagerness and surprise I had closed the panel on the instant, only observing that on the other side there was nothing but a dark vacuum. Now that I wished to see whither this might lead, I found I could not thrust back the panelling again; it was as firm and undiscoverable as when, passing my hand over the spot an hour before, I had tapped it, as well as the rest of the woodwork, with my knuckles. The supposition, therefore, with which I awoke, that some one had entered the room seemed to be justified. But, if so, where was the intruder? Clearly not now present. Could he have passed up the wooden steps and gone out by the trap? No, that was shut and padlocked, as I had noticed it on the first examination. The door too was still locked on the inside, the key turned as I had left it on entering. I looked under the bed—ah! if I had only looked upon it, as I had done earlier in the evening! Had I only drawn aside its little flimsy curtain again, what might I not have discovered? What solution of the mystery might not have come to light?

* * * * *

That half-drowsy numbness above alluded to still remained, but my wits nevertheless were clear enough to admit of one definite conclusion—the conclusion that I was in the presence of the supernatural. Humphrey Thorsdane's murdered wife—aye, that was it, undoubtedly! I was directly *en rapport* with her.

The word "elation" best describes my feelings. I resumed my chair, and sat down expectant with half-closed eyes. But expectant of what? Impossible to say. Nothing happened, not a sound broke the stillness of the night, save that soothing murmur of the quiet winter sea rippling on the beach, always a sleep-inducing melody, which soon one may suppose, again lulled me into forgetfulness. How the next state of consciousness came about cannot be told: I only know that I again became aware of some change or movement going on in the room. Then, that another draught of cold air was this time sweeping round my feet and knees and simultaneously that the loose carpet was partly dragged back

sufficiently to clear a space at the foot of the ladder, where now was visible a second trap-door precisely similar to that at the top of the ladder. But this was open wide, amply accounting for the new gust of wind. Once more I rose on the instant, laid my hand on the edge of the upturned flap of the trap, and once more my eagerness balked me, for with the touch the door or flap fell into its place, closing the aperture before I had time to look down the dark abyss. All efforts to re-lift it were vain—it fitted so accurately into the planking of the floor; so accurately, in fact, that like the panel it defied detection, even had I turned aside the carpet, and examined this woodwork, as I had that on the wall previously. There was no sunk ring common to such constructions, or anything to get hold of, wherewith to raise the door or prise it open.

Of course sceptics reading this narrative in cold blood, may find some element of the ludicrous in the circumstances, and may liken them to so many pantomime tricks. I knew that such would be the verdict of my host when I came to tell him in the morning, for strangely enough, this commonplace unimportant fact flashed through my mind, in the midst of my ever-continuous drowsy elation. Little did I then anticipate that a yet stronger and far more unaccountable *pièce de conviction* would be forthcoming by the time I met him again.

But to proceed to what yet remains to be told of that ever-memorable night, and without further reference to my own sensations. All endeavours were vain to get speech with the spiritual cause of these manifestations. The spirit of Humphrey Thorsdane's wife was dumb to me. But then, was I not a novice? The natural mediumistic powers which I was sure now that I possessed were undeveloped. The subtle cultivation of our circumscribed senses is indispensable for the full attainment of free communication with the world beyond, and this I lacked, though happily I no longer do so. Had all this happened last night, or last week, instead of ten years ago, what wonders should I not have to recount! But I am again digressing.

The fascination of this new experience rendered me entirely oblivious of mundane affairs. I never even thought of undressing or turning into bed—scarcely remembered that there were such phenomena as sleeping or waking, night or day—and I suppose I must have continued without further interruption to occupy the high-backed arm-chair till dawn. For there I still found myself when it was creeping through the lattice; there I still sat when the good housekeeper tapped at the door. As it was locked I rose to open it, and she was amazed to find me up and all but dressed.

"I have not been in bed," I said, observing her surprise, though not with the least idea of relating my experiences then, for I was still possessed by that same dazed numb feeling.

"Not been in bed, sir?" she exclaimed, her expression of wonder

turning into one of horror. "Why, what has happened? You don't mean to say——" here she stopped, set down the cup of tea she was holding, and rapidly crossed to the side of the bed. Then, as rapidly drawing aside the curtain she looked in, and uttering a shriek which appalled me, cried out, "Oh! my God! then it is true! Look here, sir, if *you* have not lain down upon this bed who has? Who, who, but one! Oh! it is too terrible. I will not stay another hour under this roof—here is a proof which I have seen with my own eyes!"

She flew from the room. I went up to the bed and sure enough there, upon the counterpane, the turned-down sheet and the pillow, was the deep and distinct impress of a human form! That it was not mine I knew full well, and that it had not been there when I examined the bed on reaching my room the previous night I could swear.

Now, what will strike the thoroughly impartial mind as curious is that this discovery created in me not one tittle of surprise, far less of consternation or awe. I carefully let down the curtain again, hastily finished the little my toilet demanded, passed out of the door, and after locking it and putting the key in my pocket, went down to breakfast.

CHAPTER III.

"HULLO! old fellow! What! not in sporting rig? You don't mean to say you are going a-hunting in a frock coat and a pair of slippers? What's up? Why the horses will be round directly we've swallowed our breakfast! Go back and get yourself up properly; we shall be late for the meet."

Some such words as these saluted me as I met Thorsdane, and when I told him I was not in the mood for the promised ride, that I should ask him to excuse me, and began rapidly explaining why, he became at first sulky and then furious. But I took no notice of his words or the derision he heaped upon my account of what had happened. He declared, with many a coarse oath, that I had been drunk or dreaming, and that the impression on the bed was that of my own carcase.

"Have you ever thoroughly examined the turret?" I asked.

"No," said he; "I don't waste my time in that manner; but I know there is no way up into that room but by the way you went, so nobody could have made the dint in the bed except yourself. As to its having been done by spirits—well, you know my opinion on that subject. Now I am off; sorry you won't join me. You know I am rather an impatient chap, only you irritate me with this folly. We won't talk about it. Make yourself at home. What you will do all day——? But that's your affair. I shall be back for dinner."

Then, having finished his breakfast, he was about to depart, but seeming to repent a little of his manner, said :

"Look here, old fellow, I will tell you what I will do to prove you are labouring under some hallucination. I'll sleep in the turret room to-night myself, and I'll bet you an even fiver there will be no panels or traps opened on me; and if any one wants to share the bed, it depends upon who it is. Now, is it a wager? Ah, I forgot, you don't bet; never mind, I'll sleep there to-night, whatever comes of it, just to show you what a—— Ah! here's Tom with my horse—good-bye," and he was gone.

I followed him out to the door, and when he had disappeared up the narrow white road over the high down immediately in the rear of the cliffs, I strolled out on to their tops.

I hardly heeded which way I turned; I had a bad headache, and was unhappy about my friend. I felt I could not stay under his roof for more than another day. It was impossible that two such opposite beings as we had become could ever return to the intimacy of yore, and I determined to leave the Clive the following day. The air was refreshing, and very congenial to my mood would have been the solitary stroll along the wild coast but for this shadow, neutralizing as it did my elation at the discovery of my spiritualistic attributes. Even as it was I found myself by degrees musing pleasantly. The great grey boundless expanse of the Channel, fringed by the chalky declivities of the white-faced cliffs, looked grand, impressive, ominous, for a change was coming over it. A fresh south-west breeze had driven the autumn mists away from the shore and downs, and the ocean, in response to its ever-increasing force, was by noon beginning to thunder heavily against the base of the cliffs. But the tide was ebbing and it would be past midnight ere it returned, and as the day wore away and the wind did not abate, it was easy to foretell a rough and boisterous night.

It was late ere I went back to the house to find a domestic commotion going on. The housekeeper had departed for the farm with the avowed intention of never sleeping at the Clive again. The two remaining female servants, meeting me on the threshold, expressed their determination to follow her. They would stay to cook the dinner, yes, but no more. If master wanted to sleep in the turret room, he might make his bed up himself—they were not going a-nigh it again; it was certain sure now the place was haunted as people said, and as they, for their parts, had always believed.

Such an announcement was not likely to promote harmony on the master's return, which took place amid heavy rain just before dark, but again I abstain from any too direct description of his words and conduct. It is enough that we dined and passed the evening together, as on the previous one.

When bedtime approached, I felt it necessary to refer to his proposal about sleeping in the turret, and I said :

"You must do as you like in your own house, of course, but pray have the goodness to come up with me and see for yourself whether the impression is, or is not, on the bed. I have never been into the room since I left it. I have kept the key in my pocket because I wanted to convince you that at least I was not drunk or dreaming, and that what I told you is true. I intended taking you up this morning, but you were off too quickly ; and though I do not wish to obtrude my opinions, or superstitions if you please, I want you at least to believe that there is something connected with the turret room which you do not fathom."

The mere mention of this subject (we had avoided it hitherto) seemed to aggravate him, and without pursuing our disagreeable dialogue in detail, I will merely say that he insisted on carrying out his intention of passing the night in the haunted room.

"If the bed has not been slept on except by a ghost," he said, "it does not want making. You shall turn into mine, or sit here all night if you prefer it and await what happens to me ; but I am going to sleep in Mrs. Humphrey Thorsdane's room, and I warrant she and I will be better friends than you were if she appears through the trap or the panel, so hand me the key."

This sally was followed with the usual offensive comments on my credulity, producing its usual feeling of disgust in me. A long silence succeeded. Yet no ; silence is not the word, for there was no silence in the house the whole evening. The gale which I foresaw in the afternoon was increasing every moment, and by this time was well nigh blowing a hurricane. The roaring of the wind was tremendous ; the sea, as the tide rose, thundered upon the shore and against the cliffs and at the base of the house itself with terrific force. Nothing in the spiritual world could be half so fraught with awe as this dread reality, this conflict of the elements in their fury.

My host and I, sitting as on the previous night in front of as much fire as the howling wind down the chimney would allow to burn, looked at each other furtively. At length a more than usually loud crash of the storm literally made the whole fabric quiver, producing the actual effect of an earthquake. Everything in the room shook, the glasses on the table vibrated, the pictures on the wall swayed. I rose, exclaiming :

"The house will fall—your expectations will be realized, Thorsdane ; that settles the question. It will not be safe for you to sleep in the turret to-night, or anywhere else *here*."

"I shall do so, nevertheless, my friend," he replied calmly, looking up at me ; "we are used to this sort of thing, as I told you. It's only these fools of servants who are filled with fear, and now you have made it worse with this bosh about the ghost—I wish to goodness you had held your tongue."

More to this effect followed, and when a slight lull in the hurricane presently ensued, he filled himself another glass of grog, saying he should go to bed, and adding:

"I will take this up with me, to give me courage to face this tremendous ordeal in the haunted room."

Reading over what I have here written about my erewhile friend, I fancy I have hardly conveyed a notion of what there was in him which filled me with an hourly increasing aversion. If such be the case, it must be attributed to considerations of good taste. To a stranger not sharing my sensitiveness on matters spiritual, Thorsdane possibly would not have appeared in the same light that he did to me. Perhaps after all the fault was mine, but be this as it may, I must again express my gratification at not having resented more actively than I did, his scoffing ribald tone.

"I will go up with you and unlock the door, anyhow," said I, leading the way to the foot of the turret stair. He made no objection and we entered the room together. Walking up to the bed, candle in hand, and drawing aside the curtain, I was about to say, "Now, come and convince yourself," when to my momentary discomfiture not a sign of the impression was left. The whole surface of the bed was as smooth, undinted and undisturbed as when I first beheld it the night before. Thorsdane saw my perplexity and its cause, and burst into a shout of laughter. At the expense of considerable self-control I refrained from contending the point, and only said:

"It does not alter the fact, and you will observe that the carpet is still dragged back from the foot of the steps. This is where the second trap lies," I continued with a stamp on the spot with my foot, "and this is the panel that slides back," tapping it as I spoke. So suddenly variable were his moods, there was no knowing how to take him. He now assailed me with a torrent of anger, and went as close to calling me a liar as he could without using the words, but finally I held out my hand and said as good-humouredly as I could, "Well, good-night, old friend; I hope you will sleep in spite of the storm."

He took the proffered palm sulkily. We parted, and I shall never cease to thank God that we did so at least with this recognized act of goodwill.

The hurricane continued to rage with unabated fury, whilst in the turret I heard the distinct splash of the sea more than once against the lattice window, not the mere spray, but as if a torrent of water had been dashed against the glass, and as I descended the stair the whole fabric positively rocked.

Regaining the snug parlour, I made up my mind that I would pass the night there. I have the faculty of sleeping comfortably in a chair, and there were two easy ones here, but sleep was out of the question on such a night. The lad Tom, who acted as groom,

was the only servant who had consented to remain at the Clive. Where he slept was unknown to me, for the boy's sake it was to be hoped his room lay, like the snuggerly where I sat, on the landward side of the house. No words can describe the hurly-burly of the tempest. Blow after blow seemed to strike cliff and house simultaneously, whilst crashes, howls and shrieks of wind rent the air. An hour may have passed when suddenly a white scared face appeared at the door opposite me; to have heard it open was impossible. It was the groom who had feared to go to bed.

"I think something has happened in the tower, sir," he went on to say. "My room is not far off it, and I am sure I heard a scream or a cry in it as was not made by the storm, and I have crept down for company's sake, sir, if you wouldn't mind."

I tried to reassure him, but when he heard that his master was sleeping in the turret, he begged that we should go and see what had happened.

"There ain't no other way to it, you know sir, but along the passage past this door. Will you come and see, sir?"

I hesitated. I had no wish to encounter my friend again that night; but at length, yielding to the lad's entreaties, I went with him.

There was no likelihood of our being heard, even had we knocked at the door, so at once laying my hand on the lock, it yielded instantly, and the lad and I entered the room together—and together our eyes fell upon the outstretched figure of Thorsdane on the floor, senseless, if not dead.

To kneel down, raise his head, and feel his pulse was the act of a moment, Tom helping me. His eyes were closed, but he still breathed faintly I thought.

"Hold him for a moment," said I, "while I get a pillow."

I was about to seize one from off the bed, when my hand was arrested, for there again beyond all question was the deep unmistakable impression of a human form exactly as I remembered it yesterday morning. Still, without a feeling of surprise, I unhesitatingly grasped the pillow. For a moment it resisted my hand just as it would had a human head been resting on it, but I drew it away, and though deeply moved and with a sort of electric quiver running through my whole frame, I stooped and placed it under Thorsdane's head. He was completely dressed as I had left him, had not even kicked his slippers off.

"Fetch the brandy off the table in the sitting-room," I cried; and the boy, more dead than alive, staggered from the room. Ah! who can appreciate my sensations during the few minutes I was left alone. The world would interpret them as cold and selfish, for I was not the least perturbed, I merely appeared to be drawn one step nearer to the unseen. The candle flamed and guttered in the wind, which swelled the curtains out like sails before the windows, but it shed light enough to show all things plainly in the

room. To show me Thorsdane's motionless face, and to show me—as turning from it to the bed—that the deep impression on it had again vanished. Yet, what had happened? What angry force had struck down this scoffing unbeliever? What was the solution, the nature of the mystery pervading this room? Despite the terrible situation, despite the calm steadiness of my nerves, I found myself revolving these questions when the boy returned.

The stimulant had no effect; it could not pass beyond the lips.

"You must ride off," said I, "for a doctor at once. Get round to the stables somehow, and make the best of your way to Bright-sea; it will be difficult on such a night, but you must try. Help me to lift your master on to the bed, and then go like lightning, though I fear he is dead."

Thus we two alone in that lonely house performed what proved to be the last rites for the dead. Not five minutes after we had sorrowfully left the turret, and when I was letting the lad out by the hall door, lantern in hand, there burst upon our senses a roar and a crash, a thunderous peal, which rose high above all the clang and clamour of the storm. The floor, the walls, the roof, rocked, split, upheaved, and a blast of the hurricane swept in upon us, as the seaward front and turret angle of the house parted and fell away from roof to basement, whilst we, struck and smothered with falling *débris*, rushed forward through the open door, out into the darkness of the night.

The catastrophe had come at last! The greater part of Thorsdane Clive, and the beetling cliff on which it stood, had fallen; had been engulfed, swallowed by the insatiable sea. But the boy and I had reached the little bit of rough, level ground immediately in its front, and by which it was approached from the road. We were in safety, and looking back, could discern, even through the bewildering blackness of the storm-rent clouds, the great void at the eastern end of the structure.

* * * * *

Ten years have slipped away since then, carrying with them nearly every trace of the spot, save when at low water in calm weather, the adventurous searcher for the wonders of the shore, occasionally turns up conglomerate lumps of seaweed and mollusc-covered fragments of brickwork. Inquiring perhaps of the elderly native how they could have come there, he may chance to hear the fate of Thorsdane Clive, and the terrible end which befel its latest master. But until the present moment no accurate accounts of his last hours have been given, nor would they now, but that I have been asked to write out some of the most remarkable of my spiritual experiences—those, I mean, in which I was a direct participator. This one by the winter sea was the first, as has been hinted. Although nature, by enshrouding it in her mighty bosom with her other endless secrets, thereby precluded a solution of the

mysteries which I went through, I see no reason to deem them mysteries now that I have acquired fuller powers of communicating with the unseen. Limited though, of course, these powers must ever be on this side of corporeal death, they are all sufficient to confirm my original impressions. I have become what is vulgarly dubbed by a sceptical world, a medium. But I hope, that as I never should think of exercising such sacred gifts for mercenary purposes, I may be acquitted of any desire to propagate my creed unduly, and that at the worst, I shall only be set down for what poor Thorsdane said I was, the victim of wild hallucinations.

THE BLACK BOX.

By M. DEANE.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN BROWN was very busy; he was the man in charge of the parcels office at the Great B—— Junction. It was New Year's Eve; the parcels poured in, and his hands were full. Five minutes before the express started for London, a tall woman, closely veiled, entered the office, followed by a porter, bearing a long black box.

"I wish to leave this box," she said in a low voice, with a slight foreign accent, addressing John Brown; then turning abruptly to the porter, she slipped a coin into his hand and disappeared as suddenly as she had entered.

"Thankee, ma'am," said the man, pocketing the money. It was a cold night, but drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. "That were a heavy one to carry," he muttered as he left the office. The box he had just put down was an old-fashioned long black trunk, of a lumbering, bygone shape.

Brown duly entered it in his book, and looked out into the crowded platform after the tall, graceful figure of the owner. Once he thought he saw her, but other parcels arriving, obliged him to return to his work, though no one else entered his office whose appearance roused his curiosity in the same manner.

The stranger herself had taken a seat in the London express, and was being whirled away into the darkness, forgetting to call for her luggage, which lay unclaimed in the corner of the parcels office, in the same place where the porter had put it down ten minutes ago.

Midnight had struck. Brown prepared to go home; he had sorted all the parcels; many people had called and taken away their baggages, &c.; but a great number still remained unclaimed. As he glanced over the latter his eyes fell on the long black box.

"That's a rum-shaped article," he said to himself, "and a queer party as left it here. She's never called for it. It takes an uncommon lot of room; it's full of valuables, I fancy; leastways she gave Jim ten bob for carrying it. I saw the gold, for all he shoved it in his pocket so sharp." Here he bent down and examined the lid in search of a label or address of some kind; but

there was nothing—not a letter or mark on it. He turned it over to examine the other side. “Whew,” he exclaimed in amazement, as he felt its weight, “no wonder Jim said it was a heavy one.” It was like lead. Brown had lifted many a heavy box before, but never had he felt this strange dull weight. The other side was equally bare—no label or address of any kind. He felt vaguely disappointed, without knowing why. Hundreds of boxes and parcels were left at the office, and he had never before experienced the slightest curiosity as to their contents or addresses. With a lingering glance at the box, he closed and locked the office door. As he walked slowly down the street to his lodging, his thoughts revolved over the possible contents of the black box. His curiosity rose higher than ever. “It *must* have been valuable,” he argued to himself; “she gave him half-a-quid for carrying it.” As he wondered over this extraordinary liberality, he paused, and clinking the office keys, he said aloud, “I’ve half a mind to go back.” Almost as he uttered the words, he began to retrace his steps; two or three sleepy porters met him on the platform, and stared in surprise at his reappearance.

“Back again? What’s up, Jack?” said one.

“Nothing,” he answered hurriedly. “Dropped a shilling somewhere in the office; I must go and look for it.” He opened the door almost timidly, and lit his lamp once more. There lay the black box where he had left it. He locked the door, seated himself on a small, unclaimed portmanteau, and stared with renewed interest at the long flat trunk before him. “I’ll do it!” he muttered at last, and kneeling down, he tried all his keys, with trembling fingers, in the lock; one proved successful; he turned it round more firmly and raised the lid. A black shawl hid the contents; taking it off in breathless excitement, a sight met his gaze which filled him with horror. He remained as if paralyzed. His red face paled to his very lips, cold and rigid; his heart gave one bound and then seemed to stop beating.

There lay, framed in that strange case, a young and lovely girl, scarcely more than a child; her fair hair streaming over her shoulders, her blue eyes widely staring, the mouth parted in a smile, the slender figure clad in a dark blue riding habit, and one little gloved hand still grasped a riding-whip.

Mechanically Brown took in all these details, till his terrified gaze fell finally on a glistening object in the breast of the dark habit. With a shaking hand he brought his lamp nearer; its glare revealed the hilt of a strangely-carved knife, and all around it a dark and terrible stain.

With an inarticulate cry, John Brown fell back, overturning the lamp.

James, the porter, who had been so handsomely rewarded by the mysterious lady, was getting very cold and tired. It was nearly his off-duty hour; as he passed the parcels office he knocked at the

door to know if Brown was still there. No one answered, and seeing no light he was about to pass on, when he heard a voice so unlike Brown's ordinary brisk tones that he hardly recognized it, calling to him, "Jim, is that you?"

"Yes," answered Jim surprised. "Are you coming home? You've bin a long time looking for that there shilling."

The door opened slowly and Brown staggered out a step.

"Come inside and give me a light. I've upset the lamp," he said still in that hoarse, strange voice.

Jim entered and struck a match. The lid had fallen to, and, except that the big box was dragged to the middle of the floor, the office looked much the same as usual; but as he glanced at his companion's face and remarked its unusual pallor, he uttered an exclamation of surprise. "What's up?" he said, roused from his sleepiness and fatigue.

With trembling voice, Brown asked him if he remembered bringing in that long box to his office.

"Of course I do," said the porter, grinning at the recollection. "She were a good sort too as brought it; she tipped me ten bob!" and he dived his hand complacently into his pocket. But when Brown proceeded to relate the awful discovery his ill-timed curiosity had brought about, Jim's face grew as pale as Brown's own; and as the latter finished his dreadful account by raising the lid of the box, the porter started violently and rushed to the door.

But Brown caught him frantically by the arm. "Jim, don't leave me! For heaven's sake tell me what's to be done!" he gasped. "I can't tell anybody about it, or I shall get the sack for having opened it, and maybe they'll think I had a hand in it! I cannot stay here with *that* lying in the office, waiting for the woman to call for it, which I am certain she never means to do!"

Jim could only stare in stupefied horror at the body of the fair girl lying in the black, heavy trunk at their feet, revealing a crime cruel and terrible—a ghastly tragedy concealed from the eyes of the world.

When John Brown's trembling hold relaxed upon the lid, the dull thud as it closed roused both men with a shudder. For some minutes they remained silent, then James said in a whisper, "I have it! The up-train leaves at 7.30 a.m. to-morrow; you lock up the box, and shove it outside the moment the train comes in. I'll be ready, and clap a label on it to Paddington, and the first passenger as has any luggage, I'll shove *that* on the truck, put his things on the top, and send it off!"

Brown jumped at this idea of a quick deliverance from his painful dilemma. As the porter finished, he seized his hand and shook it. "You're a sharp 'un," he said, his haggard face taking a tinge of its usual colour in his wild excitement. "It's the very thing. If ever you want a turn done, I'll help you, that I will! When they find it at the other end, why, it's the police's business to

ferret out who murdered that poor young creature—anyway, it wasn't me, and I shan't have it lying there; even when the lid is shut I seem to see her face. I'll put it ready for you outside the minute the train comes in. You *are* a sharp 'un!" he repeated; "I should never have thought of that plan."

Jim looked gratified in spite of his fright and consternation. Mr. Brown was usually rather above him, and he felt elated at the way his plan had been received. Brown himself was still completely unhinged by the shock he had received; his usual sharpness had deserted him, and his reeling brain could form no better plan. Of the consequences he could not dream; he only felt an overpowering longing to be rid of the black box and its fearful secret. He and Jim paced the deserted streets, cold and sleep alike forgotten. At six o'clock, in the dark coldness of the New Year's morning, they returned to the station to await the arrival of the up-train.

CHAPTER II.

ONLY one passenger alighted on the platform of B—— Junction, and stood shivering in the raw air that New Year's Day, 1878: a tall, handsome man with a bronzed careworn face, dark eyes, and hair streaked with grey—his whole air bore the traces of great grief and impressed a stranger with the idea of a man whose life has been marred by sorrow, which was enhanced by the expression of stern melancholy about the mouth. This man was no other than Grenfell Egerton, the celebrated African explorer, whose wonderful adventures and discoveries had been the topic of conversation in all literary society for many years. He had landed in England late on New Year's Eve, and had resumed his journey by the first train to London, where he was to meet his daughter, after an absence of fifteen years. He had left her a baby of two years, and even now it was less affection that brought him once more to England and his child, than necessity, for three months ago he had become possessed of an enormous fortune; and the trustees most urgently requested him to return to claim his property.

Most unwillingly Mr. Egerton left the shores of Africa and in due course arrived in England on New Year's Eve as before mentioned. He had a very unusual quantity of luggage (for a man), great boxes and chests, containing many strange and rare treasures, collected in his long wanderings all the past years.

All the luggage was labelled, Paddington. As the traveller stepped into the express and his belongings were placed in the van behind him, there was yet another box added to the pile, a long, heavy, black box, also labelled Paddington.

"All yours, sir?" shouted a porter as Mr. Egerton alighted at the terminus.

"Yes," answered the traveller briefly glancing at the pile of

luggage and feeling bewildered by the noise and bustle of the great railway station, after the solitudes to which he had been so long accustomed. At last it was all arranged on the top of the four-wheeler, to the porter's and cabman's satisfaction, and Mr. Egerton was rattled off to his town house quite oblivious of the awful secret he was bearing with him. His thoughts turned with strange pain and longing to his only child, the daughter whom he had hardly seen. Once or twice a year she wrote him a short affectionate letter, and he answered it by sending some present back from Africa, a strangely carved bangle, paper knife, &c., and in this way had satisfied his conscience he was doing all that was expected of him.

The death of his beloved wife Lucy Egerton and of his infant son had affected the whole course of his life. He had thrown up every occupation, put his little daughter under the charge of a French governess of his wife's, before her marriage, turned his back upon home, England, friends and child, and buried himself in the wilds of Africa, hoping to stifle sorrow in a life of hardship and adventure, where he was soon forgotten by all save a few literary friends, who watched his progress and discoveries with a sort of faint interest, and his little lonely deserted child, who passed her days in alternate monotonous visits from the dull country house to the dreary town residence, both left by Grenfell Egerton's express desire in exactly the same order as when occupied by his fair bride-wife. As he stood on the steps of his old home in Queensgate Square, a flood of memories rushed over him, and on entering the drawing-room, so well remembered though so long unentered, again he seemed to see his wife sitting at the little writing table, with the light on her fair hair. The room, except for that dear presence, was exactly as he had left it; so far his orders had been most carefully attended to. Would his daughter be like *her*? It had always been his fancy that he would one day trace the features of his lost Lucy in her child's face. With a strange feeling he heard the rustle of a woman's dress. The door opened, and his daughter stood before him.

One glance at the girl standing timidly, half afraid to advance, near the door, and Grenfell Egerton felt a cold wave of disappointment, and his momentary affectionate feeling died away as he bent down and gave the girl a cold kiss.

A flush of colour rose from her neck to her white forehead, but she did not return his embrace, and stood with downcast eyes before her newly restored father.

Many a man would have envied Grenfell Egerton; the girl was beautiful! A slight but perfect figure, oval face, with dark dreaming eyes, fringed with black lashes, her colouring pale but delicate, and a wealth of dark hair wound in heavy plaits round a small well-shaped head; her mouth was small and sensitive, its expression was proud and sad; her hands and feet were alike small

and beautifully shaped, a girl to be proud of. Yet the father only felt a vague unreasoning disappointment as his eyes took in all the details of the girl's beauty.

"You are not like your mother," he said at last to break the awkward pause which followed his embrace, and his face and voice alike betrayed a feeling of resentment. If only his boy had lived, he thought bitterly; what use ~~was~~ all this wealth to be at the disposal of a girl, for he himself cared nothing for the money so unexpectedly bequeathed him, and once his affairs were arranged he meant to return to his travels and wandering life.

She did not look, or attempt any caressing words to her newly recovered father as she answered in a low trembling voice, "I am not thought like her." She did not even call him by the familiar name of father; if Mr. Egerton was cold, his daughter was equally so.

Another silence ensued, but this time it was broken by the abrupt entrance of a servant. "What is it?" inquired Mr. Egerton turning with an air of relief to the man.

"Please, sir, I can't open one of the boxes; none of the keys will fit it," answered the valet.

"I must go, Madeline, and see about the unpacking," said the traveller, anxious to see how his treasures had borne the long journey. "I shall not unpack everything to-day, but if I should come to anything particularly interesting, I will call you."

The girl murmured, "Thank you," in her low voice and Mr. Egerton left the room. As the door closed between them, she pressed both hands to her heart in a wild manner to still some pain. "I can *not* do it" she cried, her voice half suffocated by her emotion. "It is a cruel wrong—oh, what will become of me! Where have they taken her?" Flinging herself on her knees beside the sofa she burst into passionate tears.

CHAPTER III.

MR. GRENFELL EGERTON looked in surprise at the box that had resisted the servant's efforts to open it. "I don't remember this one," he said, passing his hand across his forehead. "I can't think what's in it; I do not remember packing it in the least; but we will soon find out. Just get a chisel and force the lock; don't break the keys over it." The servant obeyed; in a few seconds the lock gave way and he threw back the lid. The black shawl, hurriedly replaced by John Brown's shaking hands, concealed the contents as before. "Take that off," cried Mr. Egerton impatiently; the servant raised it hastily, but at the unexpected sight thus revealed, he uttered a cry of horror and turned to his master for an explanation.

But as he saw Mr. Egerton's face his cry froze on his lips.

Grenfell Egerton stood over the box his bronzed face livid and distorted, its deathly pallor rivalling that of the dead girl at his feet so cruelly murdered in the dawn of womanhood. Raising his clenched hands above his head he struggled for speech.

"Lucy! Lucy!" he groaned at last, uttering his dead wife's name for the first time in all the long years since her death. Before he had finished, with her name still on his lips, he staggered and fell motionless across the box.

The terrified servant rushed to the door to call assistance, but on the threshold he was met by Madeline.

"Who called?" she asked breathlessly.

"Don't go in, miss," gasped the man hurriedly. "Master has fainted."

But her eyes had clearly seen Mr. Egerton lying face downward over the black box. She pushed past the trembling servant and bent over the prostrate figure. "Raise your master," she cried; "he is ill."

Mechanically the servant advanced, and with difficulty removed the unconscious form and supported his master's head against his knee.

"Look, miss," he said in a hoarse whisper; "that's what made him faint," and he glanced shuddering at the secret of the box.

No need to say "look!" At the awful unexpected horror thus revealed Madeline stood transfixed. With dilating eyes she took in all the beauty of the murdered girl before her—the lovely child-like face with a smile still lingering on the pale lips, the rippling, golden hair, the slender figure in its closely fitting habit; finally her stony gaze rested on the hilt in the breast, with its crimson stain spreading round, telling its own tale of dark guilt—a tragedy concealed from the world.

"How came it here? Who was she?"

The servant's voice roused Madeline from her silent horror.

"Master won't come to, miss," he said anxiously. "What am I to do?"

She looked vaguely at him for a second, then she spoke in a hard, strained voice. "Leave him and go for Dr. M—— at once. I will remain with your master. Say nothing of this if you value your place," she added, pointing with a firm hand towards the box.

As the door closed the girl sank on her knees beside the dead, and gazed into the smiling face as though she hoped to read there the key to the terrible mystery. Then raising a tress of the long fair hair to her own pale lips she kissed it passionately. Like Mr. Egerton, she too uttered the name of a woman, but it was the name her father had addressed to her on his arrival, not the same that had burst from his lips in such despair a few seconds ago. "Madeline," she whispered, as though the dead could hear her voice and understand its passionate remorse, "you shall be

avenged! But for me you would have been alive and happy—the crime is mine! How came you here—to haunt me? They forced me to deceive you, but I loved you. I will never rest till your death has been avenged. Farewell, my loved one! my little Madeline!” Once more she kissed the fair hair solemnly, then rising quickly to her feet, she left the room without even a glance at Mr. Egerton, who lay still unconscious on the floor.

Great events are often crowded into a little space. The startling discovery and its consequences had only occupied fifteen minutes. Two o’clock struck as Madeline Egerton left the house, dressed in a dark walking dress and black fur cloak thrown hastily over her shoulders—she had no luggage. With thick embroidered veil, she defied recognition effectually, and walking to the corner, she hailed a cab and drove off through the crowded streets.

CHAPTER IV.

It made a great impression on almost every circle of society. Nothing else was talked of or discussed throughout London. The reappearance of Grenfell Egerton, the celebrated traveller, whose discoveries and adventures had interested all Europe, under such painful and extraordinary circumstances, caused the greatest excitement. He was now, three days after his arrival, in prison, on a charge of murder.

The discovery of the body of a young and lovely girl, cruelly murdered, in his own house, had led to his arrest, though he denied all knowledge of the crime.

* * * * *

The courts were crowded to hear the case, and the greatest interest prevailed. As the first witness was called, Miss Madeline Egerton entered the witness box, closely veiled. A murmur of surprise ran through the spectators.

“His daughter!” said a former friend of Mr. Egerton.

“Never heard of her before. Where did she come from?”

“Oh,” said his companion, “I fancy when Egerton went cracked about his poor wife’s death, he left the child in charge of a French governess, a tall, dark woman. She went on the stage ten years ago, and sings under the name of Silvani. I believe she married the Polish count who sang tenor at the opera years ago, and she brought up Egerton’s daughter with her own child.”

“An odd life for the poor girl,” said the other pityingly; “but I suppose anyhow she will come into a heap of money some day.”

“Hush! Hush!” said several voices, as the witness threw back her veil and took the required oath.

A murmur, this time of admiration, went round the court, as the girl stood calm and composed, her exceeding pallor enhancing

the splendour of her large eyes, of a deep, dark blue, fringed with black, drooping lashes. The two gossips again began to comment.

"He won't be able to hide *her* much longer," said the first speaker. "I never saw a more lovely face."

"Dreadful thing for the poor girl altogether," said his friend. "But listen; she is going to speak."

"Are you Mr. Grenfell Egerton's daughter?" inquired the Q.C., more as a matter of form than on account of the importance of the query.

Amidst a silence that might be felt, the girl's voice, though low, says distinctly, "*No, I am not.*"

The judge looked up incredulous at this unexpected and astonishing reply. All eyes were turned upon the traveller, who until now had remained seated, by permission of the judge, being still utterly prostrated, mind and body, with the sudden shock, and seemed stunned with despair and quite unable to grasp his painful situation. But now he started to his feet as this girl he had supposed to be his only child publicly renounced him. "Am I going mad?" he thought, pressing his hands wildly to his forehead. With a violent effort at self-command, he forced himself to listen to the next question, clinging to the back of the chair for support.

"What *is* your name, then?"

"Lina Kamberowski."

"Were you in Mr. Egerton's house the day of his arrival?"

"I was."

"In what capacity?"

"As companion to Madeline Egerton."

Mr. Egerton leant forward in fearful excitement, which he with difficulty suppressed.

"Was Miss Egerton also in the house?"

For the first time the witness hesitated, and her face grew more deathly pale.

"Yes," she said at last, as if the words were forced from her without her will.

"Where was she at the time this box was opened?"

For the space of a second there was silence; the girl glanced fearfully at the black box which lay upon the table before the judge, empty now of its sad contents. Madeline Egerton was hidden from the world once more, this time for ever, in the cold, dark earth!

Lina Kamberowski struggled for composure, but in vain. "Where was she?" she repeated; then putting both hands to her eyes, as though to push back some awful sight, "Madeline Egerton was lying in that black box, murdered! stabbed to the heart!" She uttered the last words in so terrible a voice that a shudder ran through the listeners. Mr. Egerton fell back in a sort of fit and was carried hastily out of court.

"Will you repeat your statement?" asked the horrified counsel. "Miss Egerton was the poor girl found murdered?"

"Yes, Madeline was murdered," repeated Lina, as though to enforce that terrible fact on her memory, then her calmness failed. "I murdered her, I, Lina Kamberowski! But for me——" She broke off suddenly, the confession seemed to burst from her with a painful effort, and before the sensation produced by her wild words had had time to make itself felt, she swayed and fell heavily forward in a dead faint, which proved so deep and so prolonged as to resist all efforts to restore her to consciousness.

After a quarter of an hour's fruitless endeavour, the doctor declared the witness totally unfit to give further evidence that day, and amidst the wildest excitement the case was adjourned, the important nature of Miss Kamberowski's evidence rendering it useless to proceed without her.

Some hours later a woman entered the cell where Lina was confined on her own evidence; the girl lay white and still only partially conscious; an occasional tearless sob shook her slender form. A female warder sat by her couch working by the dim light of a solitary candle. The intruder advanced to the girl's side, threw herself on her knees, and covered the prisoner's little white hand with wild passionate kisses. As she did so the light fell on her dark handsome face with its piercing black eyes now dimmed and marred with weeping, her pale face framed in thick dark hair. A strange face! And a strange history belonged to that kneeling figure. She was Marie Kamberowski, Lina's mother and Madame Silvani the celebrated prima donna of the —— opera. As she called her daughter tenderly by her name and strove vainly to rouse her to the consciousness of her presence, the peculiar foreign accent struck the ear. It was the same voice that on New Year's Eve had requested John Brown to take care of her luggage at the Great B—— Junction.

The warder was inured to scenes of misery, but even her callousness was touched by the utter despair of the mother as she knelt beside her child. What a fair young creature to plead guilty to so fearful a crime. Could she have been in full possession of her senses when she was giving her evidence? The short period allowed for visiting was nearly at an end when Lina Kamberowski at last opened her eyes, only to fix them with terror and loathing on the imploring face that hung over her.

"My loved one, speak to your mother!"

For all answer the girl flung out her arms with a gesture of utter abhorrence; a wild light burnt in her lovely eyes. "What have you done?" she cried. "Was it not enough to rob and deceive, but that she must be murdered! Who did it?" As her piercing horror-struck gaze met her mother's face, Marie Kamberowski started and shuddered, and unable to bear that glance from her child she rose to her feet and with a despairing gesture pressed both hands to

her neck to choke back the torrent of her emotion. "Who did it?" repeated Lina in a fierce whisper; then her strength failing she fell back on her couch once more. "For me it was done," she moaned. "I alone will atone! Deceived and betrayed; oh! Madeline, forgive! forgive!" The excitement of the interview was too much, she relapsed into her former unconsciousness.

"Time's up," said the warder at the door.

Marie Kamberowski stood as if turned to stone as her daughter uttered those despairing words.

"Atone," that word rang in her ears. She bent for one instant over her daughter and pressed her lips twice passionately to the pale face. "You shall not suffer! You are innocent—it is for me to atone. Farewell, my life!—my darling! We shall not meet again!" she murmured to the deaf ears. Then drawing down her veil she swept with graceful steps out of the cell and as the door closed between them mother and daughter were parted for ever.

CHAPTER V.

THE opera was crowded—the famous prima donna Madame Silvani had never looked more beautiful. The well-known tragedy of "*Lucrezia Borgia*" was being performed; Madame Silvani took the part of the wicked duchess. The rich costume of black lace became her tall graceful figure admirably and was totally unrelieved by the slightest touch of colour, but was fastened here and there by diamond stars; her rich voice had never been more true or powerful and held the house entranced towards the thrilling finale.

Madame Silvani's impassioned rendering of the scene between Gennero and his mother, the anguish and remorse of Lucrezia on finding her son amongst the poisoned guests, was depicted with extraordinary feeling and pathos. Several times involuntary murmurs of applause rose from the audience. As Gennero died Lucrezia advanced to the footlights, her pale face wild with the madness of despair, and gave the two last lines, "*Sul mio capo il cielo avventa! Il suo strali punitor!*" As she sank dying to the ground, the curtain fell amidst deafening applause, which was prolonged as the prima donna failed to reappear before the curtain to acknowledge the people's homage. In a few moments the manager made his appearance, his face pale and disturbed: "I have to thank you on the part of Madame Silvani, but she is too unwell to come before you again to-night." With murmurs of pity and disappointment the spectators slowly dispersed.

Behind the drop scene lay Madame Silvani on the same spot where Lucrezia Borgia had expired in the final act. The tenor supported her head on his knee and various restoratives were administered, though all present saw plainly such efforts were useless.

It was a strange scene ; the theatrical background, the fantastic dresses gave a wild appearance to the group. The flaming gas-light lit up the faces of the terrified and bewildered actors and revealed in their midst, in Madame Silvani the famous singer, the features of Marie Kamberowski. The hand was tightly clenched over a small dark bottle ; this attracted the attention of the horrified manager. "What is it ?" he asked nervously, pointing to the phial concealed in the palm of the white hand.

Alas ! the wild passionate nature had sought to avert discovery and consequent misery by taking away her own life, as she had remorselessly taken away that of the innocent girl who stood between her and her unscrupulous designs. Her daughter, the only being whose love had influenced her melancholy life, for whose sake she had unhesitatingly perpetrated the most awful crime, was innocent, and was at once acquitted, but at the cost of another's life ; her freedom was bought, but at the price of her mother's death. In the prima donna's rooms were found two sealed packets, both addressed to "My daughter, Lina Kamberowski." One contained various diamonds and other jewels presented to her during her short but brilliant career upon the stage, the other a closely written confession relating to the mysterious and terrible murder of the fair Madeline Egerton, and the extraordinary scheme of concealing the crime in the long black box.

CHAPTER VI.

MARIE KAMBEROWSKI'S confession ran as follows :—"My loved Lina, for you I write the following—the opinion of others is of no value to me ; I care for no one. I would gladly ! oh how gladly ! have saved thee from pain ; but it maddened me to see you, my beautiful Lina, in prison ! How you discovered my crime I know not. *Why* I did it and *when* I will tell you. You shall be free ; your own wild words were enough to condemn you, but you must not be suspected of a crime of which you are entirely guiltless.

"I was, as you know, governess to Madeline Egerton's mother, and I loved her dearly, but one came between us who turned my love to bitterest hate. That one was Grenfell Egerton ! The courtesy of his manner and his handsome face drew me to him with a strange fascination. I was only three years older than Lucy. At twenty I was handsome ; he admired me, but his love was never mine ! The touch of his hand, the sound of his voice thrilled my very soul ! I loved him not as these fair Englishwomen love, but passionately, with a jealous mad devotion, and he knew it ! He played with my strong feelings, he laughed at me ! his love was centred on Lucy alone, that delicate fair-haired girl with her large soft blue eyes. Well ! the end came ; she married him, and I was needed no longer. I left them with a burning hatred in my

heart, and though Lucy Egerton often wrote to beg me to go and stay with her, I refused coldly; I could not brook the sight of her happiness with the man I still so passionately loved. I went to London and took singing lessons in the hopes of gaining money by my voice.

"Your father was my singing master. He found my voice good, and, as I afterwards discovered, looked upon me as a sure means of getting money in the future. He was then a young handsome man. Karlo Kamberowski was the young Pole with the exquisite tenor voice, he professed violent love for me. I was alone and nearly penniless. With the bitter memory of Grenfell Egerton's coldness rankling in my heart, with the hopelessness and apathy of despair, I married this unscrupulous man. The same year Lucy Egerton died!

"Grenfell wrote to me in his frantic grief saying he knew I had been a friend of his beloved wife's, therefore he begged me to undertake for the sake of that friendship the entire charge of his little daughter Madeline, then only two years old; he offered me a most handsome remuneration if I would consent, and added that he was leaving England at once and probably for ever, to seek distraction from his grief in travel and a life of danger and adventure, only delaying his departure till he heard from me. When I received this letter a tumult of rage filled my heart; it was too much to ask that I should take *her* child and cherish it for him. My husband, however, whose love of money was insatiable, insisted on my at once consenting, and I date my feeling of dislike to him from that period. He forced me to accept. Madeline came; you were then only a year old. Years went on; at intervals I received letters from Grenfell, short letters merely inclosing cheques for expenses and inclosures for his child; those cold formal letters stung me afresh, the utter indifference was cutting to my pride. My long epistles, full of ill-suppressed passionate love, revived my old longing; but he remained utterly passionless and unmoved.

"Suddenly the news reached us that Mr. Egerton had unexpectedly come into a large fortune through the death of a distant relative, and was on his way back to England. My husband, whose inveterate love of money I have mentioned before, then formed the wild extravagant idea of forcing you to represent Madeline Egerton, thus eventually making you the heiress to all the newly acquired wealth; the perfect seclusion of Madeline and yourself rendering this deception almost easy, many people being entirely ignorant of your existence or of hers. I was known in fashionable circles as Madame Silvani, the great singer at the — opera, but of my private life little was known. For once I fell in readily with my husband's unscrupulous plans. I hated the child; I was jealous of your love for her, jealous of her fair beauty, and the startling likeness to her mother ever revived the

old pain and despair. But for her mother I might have been a happy woman. The difficulty was to conceal Madeline, for a time at least, so as to defy discovery. Enough! you know, my poor Lina, how we forced you to personate your companion and deceive her father; we told you there were urgent reasons that Madeline and her father should not meet for the present, and hinted that some terrible calamity would come upon us in case you failed to comply with our wishes. Once I almost relented at your utter distaste and bewilderment; but the thoughts of you, rich and living in good society, made me firm to my purpose. The London house was prepared for its owner, the old caretaker dismissed and a new set of servants engaged; they were told you were their mistress, and the day before Mr. Egerton's arrival you were installed. As you remember, all this was kept hidden from Madeline; she was unaware that you had left the house. An hour after your departure she returned from her ride. My husband had written urging many plans as to getting rid of this girl who was the only obstacle between you and the immense fortune. Now so much was ventured on it was no use hesitating as to ways and means, he said, and went on to hint at various schemes; but I read between the lines. I knew that he saw but one way, that way was as clear to me as though printed in letters of fire on my brain—*Murder* was the only way!

"As I sat in the dusk of the December afternoon brooding over my thoughts, I heard Madeline enter and run to your empty room; finding it tenantless she ran downstairs again to where I was sitting in the firelight in the old study. It was a dark old-fashioned room, with rows of musty books; over the fireplace hung quaint old pieces of armour, rusty swords, and foreign knives which gleamed sullenly in the red firelight. I rose as the girl entered and leant one elbow on the mantelpiece and motioned to her to close the door. 'Come in,' I said coldly. 'What do you want?' 'Is Lina at home, madame?' she asked in the timid voice she always addressed me, for she was always afraid of me, and she advanced a few steps towards me in the uncertain light. Her likeness to her mother was striking; I seemed to see Lucy rise before me; as the child (for she was little more) turned her large blue eyes upon me, the soul of her mother seemed to look out with unutterable reproach for my treachery. The look maddened me in my excited state; I moved impatiently, and as I did my eyes fell on the glittering hilt of a foreign knife that hung close to my head. In that instant my brain was on fire, the key to the solution of the difficulty lay in my hands. I lowered my eyes for fear even in that dim light she should read 'murder' in them.

"As I made no reply she turned to leave the room, her hand was on the door when she stopped and with a shy smile she said, 'My father will be back to-morrow. Will he come to see me here directly?'

"These questions! How should I answer them? There was one way—to silence them for ever!

"The only sound was the clock's slow ticking, as once more those blue eyes turned to mine for an answer, and the little figure stood waiting.

"Only this little fragile being between my daughter's wealth and success. A demon seized me . . . I tore the knife from the wall and as she gazed, the smile frozen on her baby face, her feet rooted to the spot, I struck her to the heart. My aim was deadly and one stroke was enough.

"She fell without a cry, but one heavy sobbing breath.

"My heart stood still as I gazed on the victim of my frantic deed, but with no regret; terror of discovery alone possessed me. Without removing the knife I seized the lifeless girl in my arms and rushed up the unlighted staircase, to your deserted room, and locking the door, I placed the body on the floor. Yes, my revenge and hatred were amply satisfied; she was quite dead. I shuddered as I looked at that calm face, now deadly pale in the fast fading twilight. I threw my black shawl over the inanimate form, and pressing my hands to my burning forehead, tried wildly to think of some plan of concealment. At that moment hasty footsteps came along the passage.

"A large old-fashioned black box lay open in the corner. I sometimes used it for my theatrical properties and had that morning looked at it with a view to using it for your packing, but finally rejected it as being too long and heavy; there was no time for reflection, the steps were approaching.

"A panic seized me. I stooped hastily and lifted the girl, still wrapped in my shawl, and placed her inside it. A strange coffin! Two or three ghastly stains had already marked the floor. I shuddered and drew a rug across the boards; locking the box I put the key in my pocket and had barely time to raise myself upright, when a servant knocked hastily at the door.

"‘A telegram, madame,’ she cried, and as I opened the door she presented me with a yellow envelope. I tore it open; it was from the manager of the opera, saying that the new singer who was to appear that night in ‘*Lucrezia Borgia*’ had failed them suddenly from illness, and he begged me to return to town immediately and take her place.

"I dismissed the servant and tried to think. In a short time Madeline's absence would be discovered; if Mr. Egerton should remain longer in England than we supposed likely, I should be questioned. Complications would then arise, and danger confronted me.

"Here was a temporary escape, but how to conceal my crime? A thousand plans rushed through my brain. Suddenly I conceived the wild idea of taking that fatal box with me and leaving it at

some large railway station to be claimed. It might be lost in this way and suspicion diverted for a time.

"Going to Madeline's room I closed her door and double-locked it. Then I descended into the drawing-room, for a sudden horror made me avoid the library. Ringing the bell, I told the servants I was going that evening to town, as I had pressing business. I desired that no one should disturb Miss Egerton as she had come in very tired from riding and wished no one to go to her that evening as she was gone to bed.

"In half-an-hour I was dressed and on my way to the station and travelling by the Great Southern line to town, stopping only once, at B—— Junction. It was only a few minutes before arriving at the junction that I conceived the idea of leaving the box and its secret at the parcels office there. With me, impulse is action!

"From all the miserable after-results I can only imagine that Grenfell Egerton must have travelled by the same line next morning, and in some mysterious way discovered the box and imagined it part of his luggage, its odd shape being not unlike his own packing cases. This unforeseen extraordinary fatality never entered my thoughts, which at this time dwelt with fierce exultation on the meeting between you and Grenfell. How could he fail to love you? All his fortune would be shortly in your power, and when he again returned to Africa I should quit the stage and live with you in luxury.

"Revenge was also gratified in the thought of the deception I was practising upon him. Oh, Lina, my darling! what I suffered when the news reached me you were in prison, arrested for my crime!

"A horrible despair overtook me and dashed my fond dreams of happiness to the earth. A remorse, not for my crime, but for your sufferings; the idea of your discovering my guilt made me tremble; that alone wrung my soul. Lina, my loved one, when I entered the cell and you shrank from me with loathing death itself was not more bitter.

"Madness raged in my brain. Your father, like a coward as he was, an unscrupulous, selfish wretch, finding discovery inevitable, had fled to Poland, fearing to be implicated in the revelations at the trial.

"I stood utterly forsaken, alone! and miserable. Twice Grenfell Egerton had stood between me and happiness; but for you, my child, my dreary life would have been ended years ago. To-night I am to play 'Lucrezia Borgia' at the opera. I feel a strange longing to bring my life to an end. Lina! why did you turn from me?

"It was for you I stained my hands with blood, only for you, to see you rich and happy. To-morrow——" But here the melancholy and painful confession ended abruptly, but its object was attained and with it was ended the secret of the Black Box.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. EGERTON returned to Africa, bowed with a new grief, that almost banished the old wound from his mind; he sought every danger amidst the deserts of his adopted country; finally he was found, three years after these sad events, pierced to the heart by the unerring spear of a savage.

In a lonely convent in the south of France Lina Kamberowski strives by daily acts of penance to atone for her share in that scheme of miserable deception which ended in so fearful a crime. Her face is drawn with pain and marked with sorrow, her lovely eyes are large and bright with unnatural light. Before long she too will vanish from the world, unsorrowed and forgotten, her young life blighted by another's crime—her heart broken by that awful sight which met her that New Year's Day.

John Brown is still at the parcels office; many a box and parcel have passed through his hands since that New Year's Eve; but he has never again had the slightest wish to open any box left in his charge or to examine its contents.

LONDON LETTERS,

TO VARIOUS COUNTRY COUSINS.

No. VII.

DEAR COUSINS,

The dancing season will soon be upon you, and it is plainly my duty to tell you all that I know about evening frocks. The favourite colours are chiefly green in various shades, cinnamon brown backed with yellow, every possible tone of red, besides white, pink and grey. Many of the new frocks have silk or satin embroidered fronts, the rest of the skirt being in coloured tulle. One indispensable feature of all gowns just now, whether worn in the afternoon or the evening, is that they shall be very tight and clinging. Bodices are made to fit as carefully below the waist as above, and when the princess form of back is adopted, the fulness is kept low, so as to give additional apparent length to the waist. It is only with a trained dress that the princess shape is used. It has always surprised me that Englishwomen of a thick build will persist in bunching out their gowns with useless and unbecoming draperies below the waist. For slight figures this is admirable; but on a well-developed matronly form, the lines should be straight from the waist and as flat as possible.

The new evening blouses are among the most useful things imaginable. I saw them at Peter Robinson's the other day. They are made in silk and can be had in any colour. The shape is an open square in front and a little low at the back. There is only just enough sleeve to give a look of finish to the bodice and to permit a very becoming lace frill to fall over the arms. A similar frill edges the opening at the neck. The folds of the blouse converge at the waist in a way that makes it look its trimmest and slenderest. Now that ready-made skirts can be bought so cheaply, while it is so difficult to get the ordinary dressmaker to make a really well-fitting evening bodice, these blouses are just the thing one needs. With, for instance, a ready-made skirt of mignonette coloured tulle and a blouse of the same shade, the trials of the toilet would be largely lessened. The addition of a châtelaine of poppies down one side of the skirt, with a bunch upon the bodice, and an aigrette of poppy buds for the hair would complete a very pretty dress. Or, with a black tulle and black blouse, a garniture of

white or yellow flowers would look extremely well, and please remember, oh short-pursed cousins, that a black gown does not date itself so insistently as a coloured one.

I have seen a lovely evening dress made of white lace accordion-pleated and worn with a pleated bodice of the same. Sometimes, the silk underskirt is accordion-pleated with plain tulle or gauze over it. This has an excellent effect. Very tall, thin girls should avoid the accordion skirts. They cling in so closely to the figure that a lamp-post effect is to be apprehended in such cases.

Very long gloves are still worn in the evening. Theoretically, I do not approve of them—practically, I agree that they are quite correct. Theoretically, every woman has pretty arms. Long gloves hide them, therefore I do not approve of long gloves. But many women fail in that part of their social duty which should induce them to have pretty arms. In such cases, the only fault I have to find with long gloves is that they are never long enough.

At a dance, not long ago, the musicians had retired for refreshment, and in their absence a handsome woman went to the piano and taking off her gloves played a stirring waltz for the benefit of those who had been quick over supper and were now longing to begin dancing again. When she stood up, after her performance, her white arms uncovered, while those of all the women round her were gloved beyond the elbows, it struck me as being a false thing in art to hide the arms. They are much more pleasing objects, when round and white, than long stocking-like cases of kid.

I noticed, at the Duchess of Fife's wedding, that the Queen did not wear long gloves—they could not have had more than six buttons. Her sleeves were short.

Girls with thin arms or an awkward gait should take lessons in fencing. Practice with the foils is excellent exercise for the muscles. The value of gymnastics for girls is only just beginning to be recognized; but in a few years we shall see a very different state of things. Wasp waists will disappear, and the true physical development will be attained, bringing increased health, vigour and energy in its train. Thin arms will be few indeed.

The hair is still worn high, and in the evenings is tossed up even more lightly and softly than when a hat or bonnet may have to be donned, and crush down the rolls and curls of the fashionable headgear. It is quite permissible for those whom this style does not suit to wear their hair low in the neck, *à la catogan*, a very becoming mode to many faces. Mrs. Langtry always wore her hair tied back in this way with a ribbon. It displays the shape of a pretty head to advantage, and when the hair is of the amenable order and bright and glossy it looks its best thus. Unfortunately, however, the hair has been so tortured and dragged about out of its natural fall, and crimped and ironed and otherwise ill-treated, that very few women are free from a certain roughness engendered

by these twistings round hot tongs and consequent breaking of long hairs.

Trains are indispensable for dinner gowns, but dancing dresses are still short. The skirts just touch the ground at the back. Sashes are almost invariably worn with the accordion-pleated ones. Sometimes they are made of stiff thick ribbon, but more frequently of soft China silks, which do not jut out impracticably, but follow the lines of the figure. They should be at least four yards long. There are few things more ungraceful than "scrimped" sashes. The ends should fall to very nearly the edge of the dress, and the bows should be liberally long.

I have four books to recommend to you. One is "An Irish Cousin," really delicious reading. Another is Miss Braddon's "Like and Unlike," quite a society story, but with a manslaughter in it. Every one unfortunately expects a murder from the author of "Lady Audley's Secret;" though the whole tendency of her later work has been away from melodrama, and in the direction of the finer social and domestic art of Sir Walter Scott. Now that murder has declined upon manslaughter, perhaps the public will permit this delightful writer to follow the bent of her inclination and enchant us with her character drawing, unmarred by corpses and inquests. The heroine's sister, Mrs. Baddeley, is one of the best delineated, most natural characters ever met with in a novel.

The third book is "About Robins," by Lady Lindsay, who has collected many songs, facts, legends and nursery rhymes about the naughty, pugnacious, but popular little red-breast. It is of the gift-book order, and is finely illustrated by the authoress.

The fourth is "Lady Claud," by Mrs. Alexander Fraser. It is inartistic, full of wrongly spelled and ungrammatical French phrases, and touches on very risky subjects; but there is a boldness of outline and vigour of touch about it that make one read to the last page, forgetting the obvious faults. It reminds me of Pilotell's sketches, wild and free, untrammelled by considerations of human anatomy, absolutely impossible and yet possessing the charm of dash and style. "Lady Claud" certainly has these, and with all its improbabilities and its torrid boudoir scenes, it is interesting and amusing.

The songs of the hour are both pretty. One is Marzial's "Stay, Darling, Stay;" the other is "Last Night," by Kjerwulf, whose name is such a puzzle to English tongues in the matter of pronunciation.

C. E. H.

BY-AND-BYE.

' BY-AND-BYE the pears will mellow
And the apples' cheeks grow red,
And the chestnut-leaves turn yellow,
Dropping on the path we tread.
Shall we walk then—you and I—
In the sunshine by-and-bye ?

By-and-bye the earth will harden
'Neath the frost-king's bitter grip,
And within the lily-garden
Winds will roar and rains will drip.
Shall we sit then—you and I—
At the fireside by-and-bye ?

By-and-bye our youth will vanish
And our buoyancy be spent,
And anxieties will banish
All our careless merriment.
Shall we love then—you and I—
In our old age by-and-bye ?

